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Digitalization of Sales: A Case Study of the Effects on Sales Interaction

Master's Thesis
Espoo, November 27, 2017

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Title of thesis: Digitalization of Sales: A Case Study of the Effects on Sales Interaction

Master's programme: Industrial Engineering and Management

Thesis supervisor: Professor Risto Rajala

Major or Minor/Code: SCI3049

Thesis advisor: Mari Holopainen, M.Sc.(Econ.)

Date: 27.11.2017**Number of pages:** 77+14**Language:** English

Abstract: During the last two decades, digitalization of communication has affected the ways businesses and customers interact. Also, digitalization has had effects on consumer behavior. This phenomenon has enabled parts of customer interaction, such as synchronous face-to-face interaction, to take increasingly place in digital channels. Furthermore, it has enhanced flexibility and efficiency of communication and enabled firms to serve a greater number of customers with fewer resources.

The nature and importance of inter-personal communication varies across contexts. That is, the digitalization of certain customer interactions require more effort and precision, while others are performed more effortlessly. In the business-to-business sales activity, creating and maintaining long-term dyadic relationships between the sellers and the buyers is an approach for companies to achieve sustained business performance. The aim to build long-term business relationships has led to a great deal of sales activity to take place in face-to-face interaction. However, digitalization of communication is rapidly changing this pattern. Therefore, the digitalization of sales interaction is a fertile ground for study.

This thesis studies the effects of digitalization on sales interactions. Moreover, it investigates the customer experience during digital sales interaction. The study is conducted as a qualitative case study, with the case company operating in the IT-industry. The research question which guides the thesis is: What factors drive the digitalization of sales interaction? The research question is further separated into two sub-questions: 1) How does the digitalization of sales interaction affect customer experience? And 2) How should the communication process be set up to support the digitalization of sales interaction? The customers of the case company are interviewed as the primary source of data. Video-recordings of sales meetings are used as secondary data.

The first main contribution of the thesis is the identification of the factors that drive the digitalization of sales. A conceptual model based on literature is combined with empirical findings to form a comprehensive picture of all the factors that enable the digitalization of sales and selling interaction.

The second main contribution of the thesis is the conceptualization of how the medium of the selling interaction affects customer experience. By mapping the co-created value of the seller and buyer during the selling phase, it is presented how a sales interaction that involves communication only in the digital channel generates transactional value. In comparison, by meeting face-to-face, both transactional and relationship value is generated. In other words, face-to-face interaction during the sales process enables value embedded in the buyer-seller relationship such as co-creation of the service, which does not happen on the transactional basis, where the offering and its functionalities are the primary source of value. Furthermore, based on these factors, it is deducted that the digitalization of sales interaction drives selling towards a transactional type, with the role of the seller becoming more of a customer servant.

Keywords: Digitalization, Personal Selling, Communication Media, Customer Experience, Value Co-creation, Transactional Value, Relationship Value

Tekijä: Miika Kangas

Työn nimi: Myynnin digitalisaatio: Tapaustutkimus digitalisaation vaikutuksista myynnin vuorovaikutukseen

Koulutusohjelma: Tuotantotalous

Valvoja: Professori Risto Rajala

Pää tai sivuaine/koodi: SCI3049

Työn ohjaaja: Mari Holopainen, KTM

Päivämäärä: 27.11.2017

Sivumäärä: 77+14

Kieli: Englanti

Tiivistelmä: Viimeisten vuosikymmenten aikana digitalisaatio on vaikuttanut yritysten ja asiakkaiden vuorovaikutukseen, sekä kuluttajien käytökseen. Tämä ilmiö on mahdollistanut kasvokkain tapahtuvan vuorovaikutuksen siirtymisen digikanavaan. Se on lisäksi kasvattanut viestinnän joustavuutta ja tehokkuutta, ja mahdollistanut yritykset palvelemaan yhä kasvavaa asiakasmassaa pienemmillä resursseilla.

Kuitenkin, tahojen välillä tapahtuvan vuorovaikutuksen merkitys vaihtelee kontekstista riippuen. Toisin sanoen, tietty vuorovaikutus asiakkaan kanssa vaatii enemmän tarkkuutta ja voimavaroja, siinä missä osa vuorovaikutuksesta on hyvinkin suoraviivaista. Yritysten välillä tapahtuvassa myyntityössä pitkäaikaisten asiakassuhteiden luominen ja ylläpitäminen on keskeinen menetelmä saavuttaa kestävä kilpailuetua. Tämän johdosta vuorovaikutus yritysten välisessä myynnissä tapahtuu usein kasvokkain tapaamalla. Viestinnän digitalisaatio on muuttamassa tätä olettamusta. Tämän johdosta myyntityön digitalisaatio on hedelmällinen kohde tutkimukselle.

Tämä diplomityö tutkii mitä vaikutusta digitalisaatiolla on myyntityölle ja myynnissä tapahtuvalle vuorovaikutukselle. Lisäksi se pyrkii selvittämään, miten asiakaskokemus muodostuu digiympäristössä tapahtuvassa myynnissä. Tutkimus suoritetaan yhden kohdeyrityksen kvalitatiivisena tapaustutkimuksena. Kohdeyritys toimii IT-alalla. Diplomityötä ohjaava tutkimuskysymys on: Mitkä tekijät ajavat myyntityön digitalisaatiota? Tämä tutkimuskysymys on jaettu kahteen spesifimpään kysymykseen: 1) Miten myynnin digitalisaatio vaikuttaa asiakaskokemukseen? Ja 2) miten viestintä tulisi myynnin osalta hallita, jotta se tukee myynnin digitalisaatiota? Kohdeyrityksen asiakkaita on haastateltu tutkimuksen primääridatana. Videoituja myynti-tapaamisia on käytetty analyysiä tukevana datana.

Ensimmäinen tutkimuksen pääkontribuutio on tunnistaa ne tekijät, jotka ajavat myynnin digitalisaatiota. Kirjallisuuteen nojaava käsitteellinen viitekehys yhdistettynä empiirisiin havaintoihin on auttanut muodostamaan kokonaisvaltaisen kuvan niistä tekijöistä, jotka mahdollistavat myynnin ja myynnin vuorovaikutuksen digitalisaation.

Käsitteellistäminen, kuinka myynnin digitalisaatio vaikuttaa asiakaskokemukseen, on diplomityön toinen pääkontribuutio. Analysoimalla asiakkaan ja toimittajan yhdessä luomaa arvoa jo myyntivaiheessa, voidaan osoittaa kuinka kauppa, joka sisältää vuorovaikutusta ainoastaan digikanavassa sisältää pääasiassa transaktioarvoa (transactional value). Sen sijaan kauppa, jossa asiakas ja myyjä tapaavat kasvokkain, sekä transaktioarvoa, että suhdearvoa (relationship value) syntyy. Toisin sanoen, fyysisessä tapaamisessa muodostuu arvoa, joka on ennen kaikkea myyjän ja ostajan välisestä vuorovaikutuksesta riippuvaista, kuten palvelun yhteiskehittäminen. Samaa arvoa ei synny kaupankäynnillisessä suhteessa, missä tarjoama ja sen ominaisuudet ovat pääasiallinen arvon lähde. Toisin sanoen, tutkimuksessa päätellään, kuinka digitalisaatio ajaa myyntiä kohti kaupankäynnillistä tyyppiä, missä myyjän rooli lähenee yhä enemmän asiakaspalvelijan vastaavaa.

Avainsanat: Digitalisaatio, Myyntityö, Viestintäkanava, Asiakaskokemus, Arvon yhteisluonti, Transaktioarvo, Suhdearvo

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who have helped me write this Master's Thesis and with my studies overall. A special thanks to Mari, for the many hours and meetings you were willing to have regarding the thesis, and the guidance you gave. In addition, I wish to thank Hanna for helping me out with the research project overall, and Risto for granting the opportunity to write the thesis and finish my degree. Furthermore, thank you family and friends for the support I received during my studies at Aalto University.

Espoo, November 27, 2017

Miika Kangas

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1. Introduction

The digitalization of communication, which has taken place during the last two decades, is changing consumer behavior while further enabling the connectivity between businesses and their customers. As consumers use digital communication platforms increasingly at work and during their free time, understanding the possibilities digitalization has for customer interaction is valuable. If businesses can successfully move communication inside the company or with customers to a digitalized channel, flexibility, availability and efficiency increases. Consumer retailing is increasingly about multiple communication channels with brick and mortar stores losing share (Ballantyne et al., 2017). Shopping over the internet has increased over the years, and opened up new markets to the disposal of consumers.

Nevertheless, this transformation is not straightforward, as different communication media have different strengths. Shifting all communication that once happened face-to-face (F2F) to happen online is often unsuccessful, if not understood and executed properly. Even with the current technological development, there are interactions that traditionally involve meeting the counterpart face-to-face. Such phases usually involve demanding communication on abstract topics, with little room for error. Selling is one action that has a strong emphasis on the importance of inter-personal interaction, which often leads the seller to meet the potential buyer personally. Especially when operating in a business-to-business (B2B) context, where companies often aim for building a mutually beneficial relationship with the customer, interaction plays an important role.

The effects that digital communication technologies have on sales interaction is mostly studied in the business-to-consumer (B2C) context, with relevant literature regarding B2B environment to be explored (Cummins et al., 2016). Furthermore, many papers focus on a marketing perspective, meaning for example how performance and leads generated for the sales function are increased. The boundaries of the selling phase are diminishing when potential customers are constantly gathering information, which is increasingly available, and evaluating potential solutions. Selling is becoming an around-the-clock activity, with interaction between the customer and seller happening through different channels. Direct implications for sales interaction would be valued, and help form a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

The objective of this study is to improve the current understanding of what are the direct effects of digital communication technology on sales interaction. When operating in a B2B-environment, the relationship between a seller and buyer is mutually important, with the possibility of evolving into something special. Therefore, studying how this relationship is altered, depending on the communication medium, is a fruitful ground for study.

Different communication media has been studied from multiple perspectives, with implications on both communication performance, and media choice. Certain mediums have benefits over another, when it comes to the transmission and processing of information. Yet, in the context of selling, clear guidelines on when and how selling over a digitalized channel can be successful, or what are the exact effects it has on the relationship between the purchaser and seller, is lacking.

Furthermore, studying this whole phenomenon from a customer experience point of view, and learning what the customer perceives as valuable, is fruitful. Insight on how the communication medium affects the dyadic relationship between the seller and buyer gives insight on when and how to use a certain medium for the selling activities. The interaction between businesses and customers is not losing importance, but it is changing. Learning how and why allows companies to serve customers better, while potentially gaining competitive advantage.

This study is organized as follows: After the introduction, the research goals and design of the thesis are briefly presented, followed by the literature review. The literature review is designed to explain the key terminology and themes that the thesis will use to aid the analysis. Following the literature review, the methodology of the thesis, and the background of the case company as well as research consortium is presented. In the subsequent section the analysis and synthesis of the findings are discussed. The final section of the study is left for the discussion and managerial implications, as well as suggestions for further research.

1.1. Motivation for the study

Forming a holistic understanding of the factors that enable the digitalization of interaction during the sales process, and how it affects customer experience, guides the thesis. Examining the effect of multi-channel communication on customer experience,

which is often used synonymously with service experience (Jaakkola et al., 2015) has been touched, but not studied especially during the sales process. As Sousa & Voss (2006) state: “customer experience is formed across all moments of contact with the firm through several channels”.

As digitalization is constantly evolving, it has also had an impact on the service economy, and an increasing number of interactions move to the digital channel (Oviatt & Cohen, 2015). For example, in the retailing industry, there has been a movement to multi-channel and omni-channel, where the consumer no longer experiences a channel as such, but rather the brand or product (Verhoef et al, 2015), while gathering information seamlessly between channels. As these type of shifts have been identified in the B2C context, studying the same type of phenomenon in the B2B context is interesting, but currently missing (Cummins et al., 2016).

The software as a service concept has enabled new business opportunities for both the provider and the customer. Once the purchased solution is delivered as a service, it lowers the required investment and risk for both parties in the purchasing phase, as the initial investment is much lower, and terminating the use of the service is easy, in case mutual expectations are not met. Furthermore, this also means that there is genuine interest and incentive by the service provider to keep on answering the needs of the customer and keep on delivering them value after the purchasing phase. (Sääksjärvi et al., 2005)

When operating in the service and solution business, the focus is more and more on the customers, aiming to keep the mutual relationship worthwhile (Hohenschwert, 2012). Historically, the role of sales interaction in the product business was about aggressively convincing customers how they are in need of a certain product and attempting to sell as much as possible in the short-term (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Nowadays, the amount of information that is at the disposal of both consumers and enterprises regarding one another has increased. Therefore, according to scholars, the role of the seller as a source of information is diminishing (Zahay et al., 2015). Currently, with the rise of the service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), the role of sales and marketing has shifted towards customer value.

As Hohenschwert (2012) sums up: “value creation is inherently dependent on the relational processes during the interactions that are on the individual-level between salesperson and customer.” Since there rarely are ready solutions for the customer to purchase as such, the interactions between the seller and buyer are of great importance, especially when adopting a value-based selling approach (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). These interactions enable for example aligning the understanding of value for both parties, and both interpreting and building the desired solution by the customer.

1.2. Research Goals and Questions

This thesis is a part of a bigger research project related to the digitalization of customer interaction, named DICIA (Aalto University – School of Science, 2016; Haaga-Helia, 2016). DICIA studies the effect digitalization has on service interactions. The research approach of the thesis is abductive, meaning that current literature is simultaneously analyzed and developed with the empirical findings (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). It involves making the most likely inference regarding the observations made in the study, in an iterative manner, which is common for case studies. The following main research question was formed to guide the thesis:

- What factors drive the digitalization of sales interaction?

The main research question is further divided into two sub-questions, which are addressed in different parts of the study:

- 1) How does the digitalization of sales interaction affect customer experience?
- 2) How should the communication process be set up to support the digitalization of sales interaction?

The aim of these research questions is to help understand what are the conditions that need to be met for the digitalization of personal sales interaction. What are the factors that enable the sales interaction to happen in a digitalized channel, or is the transition straightforward? These questions also answer what are the advantages and disadvantages of selling and interacting through a digital channel regarding the seller-buyer interaction and how it affects the customer experience. Furthermore, finding out what are the reasons why either the seller or the buyer wishes to interact using a certain channel, and what are the potential benefits and drawbacks with it are studied. The topics that were the focus of interest during the interviews are summed up in table 1

below. The customer interview questions can be found in Appendix 1 in Finnish, and Appendix 2 in English.

Table 1: Focus of the Interview Topics

<i>Experiences of the customers of communicating in a digitalized channel during the sales process</i>	<i>Factors influencing the customer's choice of the communication medium regarding the sales process</i>
Challenges of not seeing the seller face-to-face	Why was it necessary for the customer to meet the seller face-to-face
Advantages regarding the novel sales concept	What factors enable and ease the communication in a digital channel

With the help of the research questions, a bottom-up approach regarding the communication process, and how it should be set up to support interacting in a digitalized channel, is done. Furthermore, the valuable aspects of digital selling are searched and analyzed, to understand the hindrances and benefits that it brings about.

1.3. Research Design

The study is conducted as an in-depth qualitative single case study. As Eisenhardt (1989) describes some of the strengths of a case study, it is often empirically valid, as the whole process is closely tied with evidence. Furthermore, this is a study of a bounded system, as the focus is on a single company and their process, which is another characteristic of a case study setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A case study is often iterative by nature, allowing for the research questions and structure to evolve during the process (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The research design in this case study is based on an interpretive approach with an abductive process (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Dubois & Gibbert, 2010). The abductive process includes inductive phases of empirical research, but also conceptual development inspired by earlier research in the area. The empirical investigation relies on qualitative data (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data that defined the scope of the thesis. In addition, video

recordings of actual sales meetings were used as secondary data to add further validity to the findings of the thesis.

The research questions that guided the study were very loosely defined early on, and the overall approach was open-minded and enabled the possibility of completely new findings to come up. The first 13 interviews were conducted with only a general picture of the possible direction that the thesis might have, and the research questions that were eventually formed were revised multiple times after both analyzing the data and reading literature.

A single case study suited the approach of the thesis well, as the setting with the case company, Movenium, is considered unique enough to justify this statement. Furthermore, it is a common misunderstanding that theories and findings created from case studies are too narrow and can hardly be generalized, and therefore would be less worthy than a more general study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Rather, “Universals can’t be found in the study of human affairs. Context-dependent knowledge is more valuable.” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

In order to keep the scope of the thesis feasible, a few limitations and clarifications regarding the subject are necessary. The digital interaction of the selling concept in the case company, Movenium, means interacting with the customer over the phone, and with the help of a shared screen, which is also what digital selling means in the thesis. However, the possibility of communicating by for example emails and text messages is also acknowledged, but will not be concentrated on as much. Therefore, the medium will be specified when necessary.

In addition, even though the qualitative interviews have already shed light on the customer-seller interaction during the whole customer life cycle, the focus of the thesis is in the selling phase in particular. The latter stages of the relationship, such as further co-creational development of the service, will be acknowledged but not focused on as much.

1.4. Realized Research Strategy

The Master’s Thesis process began at the beginning of May 2017. The start concentrated mostly on getting to know the whole research team and the partial project

that concentrated on the case company of the thesis. The qualitative data that was to be gathered was given clear guidelines in the form of the interview questions (see Appendix 1 and 2) and overall themes, which had a significant effect on the scope and direction of the thesis. In addition, the interviewing was planned to begin as soon as possible, which meant that the first 13 interviews that were conducted during May and June of 2017 were done with a very broad touch, and concentrated on the experiences that the interviewees regarding the sales interactions with Movenium.

After the first set of interviews had been done and an initial analysis made, a research plan for this thesis was written in order to set up initial research questions. These research questions guided both the literature review and analysis of the interviews that began at the end of June and beginning of July 2017. This enabled further redefining of the research questions and gave direction on what to concentrate on with further interviews. By the end of July, a preliminary analysis and first iteration of the thesis was written and returned for review and feedback.

Based on the feedback and progression of the thesis process, a few alterations to the initial plans were made. First of all, to gather further insight into the sales process, and form a holistic understanding of the digital sales concept, three interviews were done with the representatives of the case company. Their CEO, who has a history of selling and was also the person responsible for initiating the shift in selling towards this digital concept was interviewed. Also, the voice of the head of sales, who was responsible for the implementation and further development of the digital sales concept, was heard. In addition, one of the new sales employee, who uses the digital sales process, was interviewed. The case company interview questions can be found in Appendix 3 in Finnish, and Appendix 4 in English.

Finally, during September and October of 2017, the final form of the thesis was beginning to shape. As the analysis based on the primary data, which were the customer interviews, had already been formed, further plans to gather supportive data were made. First of all, genuine digital sales meetings had been recorded on tape. Three of these recordings were watched and analyzed to gather further insight and empirical evidence regarding the analysis. Eventually, after a few iterations, the thesis was finished towards the end of November 2017.

1.5. Concepts and Terminology

Personal selling: The person-to-person selling actions, meaning there is a separate sales function or seller, who introduces and attempts to sell or at least get the potential customer to try a product or service.

Customer experience: The experience that the customer receives from all direct and indirect interaction with the provider. Furthermore, it depends on the expectations that the customer had prior to the interaction, and the value received.

Customer Value: Relates to the benefits and sacrifices of the customer, often seen as the sum of the benefits received reduced by the sacrifices made.

Value co-creation: The value, both empirical and theoretical, that is created through the interactions between a provider and customer.

Communication: The phenomenon where information is shared between communication partners in order to form a shared understanding. The extent of shared understanding is referred to as *communication performance*.

Communication Medium: According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a medium is the channel or means of expression or communication (OED Online, 2017).

2. Literature Review

The goal of the section is to help the reader understand the current literature regarding the themes of the thesis. As the thesis is about sales interaction and communication media, the review begins with an overview regarding sales and selling literature. Furthermore, understanding how some of the trends that digitalization has brought about in the big picture, such as the increased amount of information in the internet, and how it has impacted the sales process is discussed.

The second section continues by giving insight on customer experience. Through some of the linkages that can be found with sales literature, forming a concrete grasp to the fairly abstract topic is done. The concept of customer experience offers the building blocks for the analysis of what is valuable in the sales process and with the sales interactions depending on the medium. These themes are further separated into smaller sub-themes, such as value co-creation and interaction, which are salient with sales literature and the overall thesis as well.

The third section of the review is an introduction about research regarding communication media. The idea is to provide context and insight on the challenges that communication with different media brings about, and where they stem from. The thesis studies the digitalization of sales interaction, meaning interaction in a digitalized channel, therefore offering an overview on how communication is affected depending on the communication medium is relevant. Interacting face-to-face differs from interaction over the phone, or any other medium. By reviewing communication media, a bottom-up approach on how the sales interaction process should be set up so that the medium supports it, can be done. Figure 1 below sums up the three bigger themes of the literature review, and their connections:

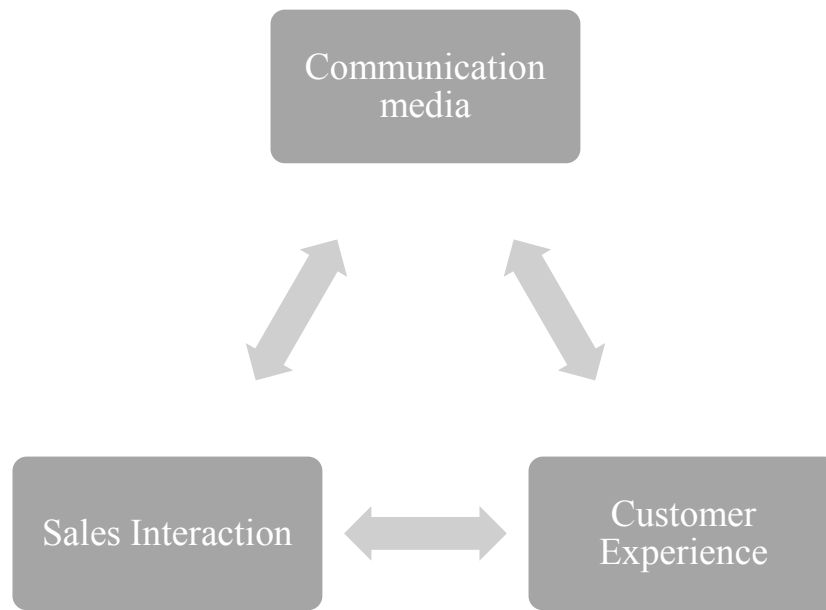


Figure 1: Themes of the Literature Review

Interactions between the seller and customer are in the heart of sales. By understanding communication media, insight on how the interaction is affected, depending on the medium, is offered. Furthermore, customer experience, which is formed through the interaction between the customer and an organization (Gentile et al., 2007; Homburg et al., 2017; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; Rawson et al. 2013; Sousa & Voss, 2006), is applied as a concept that helps on analysing the effects the customers perceive with the digitalization of sales interaction..

The last part of the literature review is reserved for a synthesis and elaboration of these themes represented in Figure 6. A theoretical framework regarding customer experience generation, and definitions of different types of interactional value, which will be used in the analysis section of the thesis, are discussed. Similarly, later on in the thesis, a conceptual model regarding the potential factors which drive the digitalization of sales interaction is done based on the review of communication media literature, and the Media Synchronicity Theory by Dennis et al. (2008).

2.1. Sales Interaction

Personal selling stands for the person-to-person selling activities, where the seller learns about the needs of the potential customer, and seeks to satisfy them with a product or service (Cant & Van Heerden, 2005). It is strongly linked with relationship building and communication, as there is the need to both understand the customer and

satisfy the needs they have (Cant & Van Heerden, 2005; Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Personal selling is often used together or even synonymously with marketing and Cant & Van Heerden (2005) argue that personal selling is one marketing activity, whereas Weitz & Bradford (1999) consider it one aspect of relationship marketing.

Already according to Weitz & Bradford (1999), the focus of enterprises is on building sustainable relationships and managing close cooperation, as it offers competitive advantage. As Weitz & Bradford (1999) state, purchasers often grow greater loyalty towards the seller than the company. The relationship between the seller and purchaser might often evolve into something special and mutually important. Therefore, the interaction that happens during the selling phase, when the first contact between the potential customer and business occurs, is of great importance. When operating in a B2B-environment, and with companies aiming for long and fruitful relationships, selling interaction has to be handled properly.

The significance of forming partnerships has all but diminished, especially when operating in the service and solution business (Hohenschwert, 2012). Companies offering software as a service need to deliver value continuously, if they wish for the customer to continue with the subscription (Sääksjärvi et al., 2005). There are multiple ways for achieving these relationships, such as providing superior customer experience (Gentile et al., 2007), and delivering an overall great service, but understanding how personal selling and sales management enables the building of these relationships is key, as well as acknowledging the new trends and changes in them.

This phenomenon of valuing long-term relationships means, that the outdated aggressive approach of convincing the customer that they are in need of a certain product has evolved to the goal of forming relationships and partnering (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). This has naturally affected both sales management, as the role of sales overall changes from individuals to teams, but also personal selling, meaning the role and actions that the seller needs to take.

Eventually, the relationship and individual focused approach is also being developed further, and the move towards customer value in personal selling is becoming salient (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015) argue that since sales representatives are often the first

contact that the potential customers face, they act as ambassadors of their company. Therefore, the relationship is built between individuals, not the customer and the company, which allows for value to be achieved during the sales process already. The linkage to Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) is worth noticing, since such creation of value requires both parties participating in the actions, as value is created and consumed together, or in other words, value is co-created (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Grönroos & Voima, 2013).

2.1.1 Value Creation in Sales Interaction

In their article, Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015) studied the value co-creation during the interactions between the customer and salesperson in the sales phase. Their findings and propositions suggest that there are two distinctive types of co-creation during the selling phase, transactional and relational co-creation. The former is defined by episode or transactional value for both the customer and seller and the latter by both transactional and relationship value for both parties. Table 2 below gathers up some of the key elements of both transactional and relationship value:

Table 2: Transactional and Relationship Value in Customer-Salesperson Interaction (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996)

<i>Transactional Value</i>	<i>Relationship Value</i>
Value in the transactional bases (for example product or brand features, quality or price)	Both parties willing to be open and honest about intentions, means and expertise that benefit both parties
"Increasing the benefits, reducing the sacrifices" (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996)	Trust, safety, loyalty and security the customer feels towards the provider
	Resonates from the transactional value

Transactional value, as the name suggests, is the value that is embedded in the service or product, be it the superior quality or brand, or special features, that the customer wants to receive (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996). This type of value is not just satisfying the need of the customer, but rather offering something extra, that competitors are missing. As Ravald & Grönroos (1996)

state, transactional value can be achieved by increasing the benefits compared to the sacrifices of the offering, or in other words increasing the value it offers.

Relationship value is a deeper level of value that is generated from the interaction between the customer and seller, and cannot be achieved on a simply transactional basis (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015). Raval & Grönroos (1996) state well how there is, and should be more to a long-term relationship between a customer and a supplier, than just transactional value. If it only resonates from episodic events, and repeated purchases, the company has not realized the salience that should be put on relationships, since they offer continuity.

Raval & Grönroos (1996) discuss how transactional value stimulates relationship value, meaning that realizing this aspect should be important for the provider. Noteworthy is, that in order for relationship value to occur, there indeed needs to be a long-standing relationship between the salesperson and customer, whereas transactional value can be generated both with the short term transactions and long-term relationships (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015).

Therefore, episode value, when positive, increases relationship value, and vice versa (Raval & Grönroos, 1996). This implies how relationship and transactional value should not be considered as separate or somehow competing. As mentioned, relationship value is often built on top of successful transactional value, with for example repeated purchases in a B2C setting, with the long-term relationship fostering into a fruitful and valuable relationship. Furthermore, it could be argued that transactional value embedded in the offering, for example product, can be copied more easily, compared to the relationship that the provider and customer might have formed along the way. (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015)

Interesting enough, whether the interaction between the salesperson and customer was to co-create transactional or both transactional and relationship value, depended on two factors, according to Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015). If the customer was worthwhile for the seller, meaning they would perceive it beneficial to invest enough time to co-create, has an effect. Similarly, the customer might only be looking for a single purchase, not seeking the formation of a relationship. All in all, the actions

and willingness of both the salesperson and customer affect the type of value that is co-created in sales interaction. (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015)

The focus on transactional and relationship value also supports the assumption that the focus of sales has shifted from individual customers and relationship management to value management, as it is argued to differentiate the winners in a B2B-context (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). According to Terho et al. (2012), value co-creation literature (c.f. Vargo & Lusch, 2004) is in line with the conceptualized model of value-based selling meaning co-creation of value between an organization and customer through interaction (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Arguing, that this sales approach is especially relevant for providers offering complex solutions and value adding services, in a B2B context, Terho et al. (2012) mention that value-based selling requires expertise and skills from the salespeople, and the supporting organization, that has not been needed before.

The rise of value-based selling is also fruitful for companies, as creating superior customer value already at the sales level is a mean for achieving competitive advantage (Terho et al., 2012; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). Terho et al. (2012) argue how the role of sales in value-based selling is about understanding how to make the customer successful. In this context, the sales actions are above all about forming a connection with the customer and understanding the needs they have, and if the company can answer those needs and make a value-proposition for the customer.

The salesperson needs to translate those value propositions into monetary value for the customer (Terho et al., 2012). Working together with the customer, by understanding their business model, a market offering with clear benefits for the customer needs to be formed on the sales level, and communicated clearly so that the customer understands and perceives this proposition. Support from the organization behind the seller is required, and Töytäri & Rajala (2015) mention how the capability of the organization to implement and support value-based selling separates the winners from the losers in a B2B market.

2.1.2 The Effect of Digitalization on Sales Interaction

The implications technological development and digitalization has on sales interaction can be studied from multiple perspectives. Not only might the communication mediums develop, but digitalization has also increased the availability of information that is at the disposal of consumers as well as providers. Customers are able to search and study important information autonomously regarding potential products or services. Similarly, providers are able to identify prospects by reviewing visitors to their websites, or through other sophisticated applications designed for the task. This is one aspect that has an effect on the sales interaction, as the topics that are handled might differ from traditional selling since the customer and provider are more aware of one another in advance.

Certain research regarding personal selling and sales management has studied interactive multi-channel and omni-channel marketing (Cummins et al., 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015), as well as the role of social-media usage in sales (Agnihotri et al., 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2012). In a B2C context omni-channel can be seen as the phenomenon of gathering information seamlessly through multiple information channels regarding a product, and eventually not even noticing a channel as such but the product or brand only (Verhoef et al., 2015). Common of these customers is that they know what they want, and want exactly it. However, Cummins et al. (2016) identify that this phenomenon has mostly been studied in a B2C-context, and relevant implications regarding a B2B environment is still lacking.

As in the omni-channel phenomenon, Ballantyne et al. (2017) state how digitalization is resulting in changing behavior of consumers. Especially in the B2C context, but also relevant for B2B firms, consumers are engaged with the social networks and what they call digital-space as much as once with brick and mortar stores. More and more consumers interact with, for example friends, and based on those interactions decide what to purchase and where (Ballantyne et al., 2017). There is more information at the disposal of customers, changing the B2B marketplace, and the role of the seller as a source of information is diminishing (Grewal et al., 2015; Mantrala & Albers, 2012; Zahay et al., 2015).

With the increased connectivity between customers and businesses, the communication and role of information during the sales phase has also been studied from the perspective of social media (Agnihotri et al., 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2012). Agnihotri et al. (2009) state how in a business context customer want information effortlessly and efficiently. Therefore, salespeople and the organization behind them should concentrate on the output of information, be it product or service related, and also focus on the technology and means by which that information is transmitted.

Rodriguez et al. (2012) suggest companies to form a two-way conversation with the customers, and opt for a pull rather than push strategy when it comes to the communication and role of information they pass on to the customers. Instead of simply handing out all the possible information to every prospect, the goal should be forming a dialogue, or value conversation.

With digitalization and increased availability of information, the roles in sales actions regarding the buyer and seller have shifted (Grewal et al., 2015; Mantrala & Albers, 2012; Zahay et al., 2015). Figure 2 below by Zahay et al. (2015) shows how the sales funnel has transformed with digitalization, and the role of sales diminished compared to marketing. The funnel suggests for companies to rethink the role of the seller and buyer in a B2B marketplace.

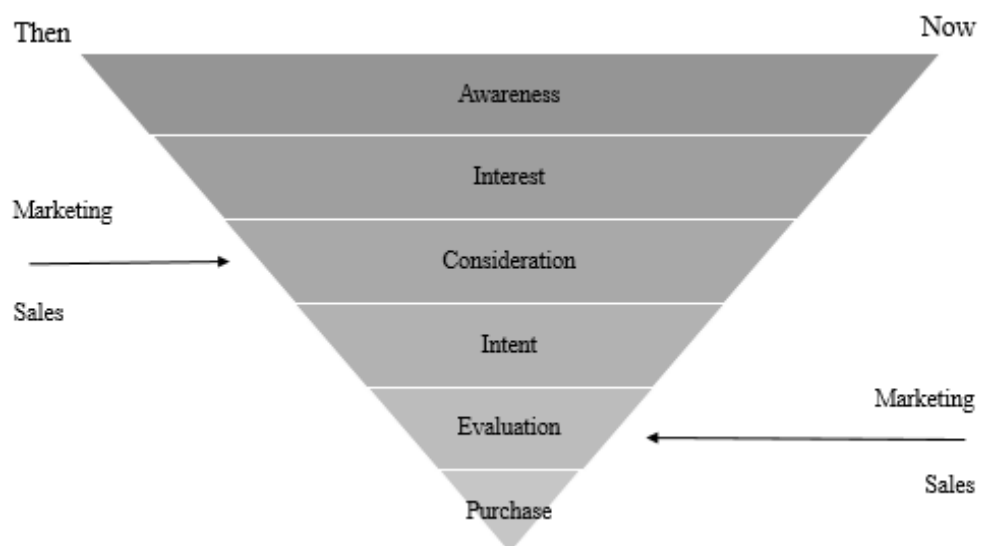


Figure 2: Changes in the Sales Funnel (adopted from Zahay et al. (2015))

Buyers can effortlessly access more information, shifting the power to them, and the moment of first contact happens later on. Often the reason for the contact is that there

are some clarifications that the buyer requires related to the product or service that is purchased. Over a half of the process regarding a complex purchase is often already done, before the engagement with a sales representative occurs, as shown in Figure 2. Mostly this work involves information search of suitable solutions, meaning that more is expected from the sales representatives than before (Grewal et al., 2015; Zahay et al., 2015).

Because of technological development, Mantrala & Albers (2012) discuss how the symmetry of information between the supplier and buyer has increased, meaning that both parties can access information regarding each other as well as competitors. Furthermore, according to Mantrala & Albers (2012), this means that the role of the seller shifts from consultative selling back to an efficient transactional type, when dealing with well-known offerings, since the seller would not have as a significant role in providing information. With more customized needs, the shift would be from consultative sales to solution co-creation (Mantrala & Albers, 2012). This feels intuitive, as the customers rely less on the information or “consultation” provided by the seller. Similar assumptions are made by Zahay et al. (2015), stating the persuasive or initiating selling role has been shifted to a supportive one.

2.2. Customer Experience

Superior customer experience, which is often used as a synonym together with service experience (Jaakkola et al., 2015), is considered a source of competitive advantage (Gentile et al., 2007; Jaakkola et al., 2015; Sousa & Voss, 2006). Customer experience resonates from the touchpoints or moments of contact between the organization and the customer (Gentile et al., 2007; Homburg et al., 2017; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; Rawson et al. 2013; Sousa & Voss, 2006), and it depends on the comparison between the expectations that the customer had and the value received (Gentile et al., 2007). It is holistic in nature, as it includes phases out of the direct control of the service supplier and composes of all the “customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses” to those contact points (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015).

Homburg et al. (2017) state that customer experience is a result of cognitive, affective, relational, behavioural and sensorial responses a person has regarding a product or brand, from pre-purchase to post-purchase. The consumer constantly reflects the

experiences of this journey to the expectations and environment. For Homburg et al. (2017), these experiences or touchpoints can be verbal or non-verbal, meaning for example advertising or usage, that the person has of the product or service, and relates to the focal brand or firm.

As the measurement of customer experience encompasses the whole customer journey, the underlying factors that form it do not change depending on the phase the customer is in, be it for example pre-purchase or post-purchase (Gentile et al., 2007; Homburg et al., 2017; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; Rawson et al. 2013; Sousa & Voss, 2006). Therefore, to understand customer experience during the sales phase, and how interaction between the salesperson and potential customer affect it, measurement of it should be done in similar fashion than in any other phase of the customer journey.

With the acknowledgment of Service-Dominant Logic (S-DL), the customer can no longer be considered as a passive recipient of a service, but rather as co-creators and determinants of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Galvagno & Dalli define in their 2014 article that value co-creation is all the empirical and theoretical value creation through interaction between a customer and an organization. Grönroos & Voima (2013) state that value co-creation often lacks concrete analytical meaning, as it is often seen an all-around phenomenon, with everyone and everything creating value. Nevertheless, they agree that without direct (and indirect) interactions, value co-creation is not possible, as it is the platform that enables the phenomenon.

McColl-Kennedy et al. (2015) identify in their article how in the customer experience mindset the role of the customer is becoming broader and influence greater. By applying a practice-based approach, which concentrates on the actions of the customer, and how they influence each other, McColl-Kennedy et al. (2015) state that the personal viewpoint of the customer determines the value perceived and influences the choices regarding engagement and interaction.

Gentile et al., (2007) further makes a distinction between utilitarian (functional) and hedonic (experiential) value that the consumer perceives. The former refers to the objective aspects of the product, such as specific features and functionalities, and the latter on responses that are more subjective from the consumer. Similarities with transactional and relationship value (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015; Ravald

& Grönroos, 1996) can be found. Combining these findings mentioned above Gentile et al. (2007) further present a conceptual framework on the different aspects that affect customer experience, which can be seen below in Figure 3:

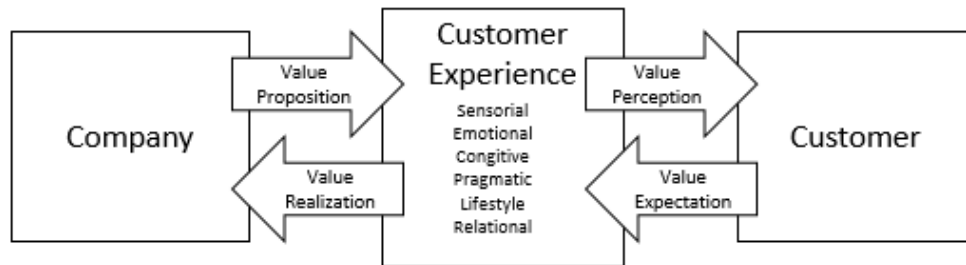


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of Customer Experience (Adopted from Gentile et al. (2007))

2.2.1 Linking Customer Experience and Value Creation

The previous chapter summed up how customer experience is linked to value, and how it is affected by both the value propositions made by the supplier and value perceptions of the customer. Similar to service-dominant logic and value co-creation, it states how the value of a service is not only delivered by the company and consumed by the consumer as in with products, but rather co-created (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The framework also shows well how the different cognitive, emotional and other responses of the customer affect the experience, which is mentioned by McColl-Kennedy (2015) and Homburg et al. (2017) as well and links to the practice-based mindset. (Gentile et al., 2007)

In the 2013 article by Grönroos & Voima, to add to the importance of interaction in value co-creation, value spheres (see Figure 4 below) are presented. It shows well, how value co-creation cannot happen with closed provider or customer spheres, but rather through direct interaction in a joint sphere. Interaction can be either direct or indirect, depending on the sphere and the nature of the interaction. Direct interaction is an action where the resources of both the customer and the provider interact in a coordinated, active and ongoing manner. Examples of such resources are personnel or servicescape, which is the conceptual landscape of a service (Ballantyne et al., 2017; Grönroos & Voima, 2013).

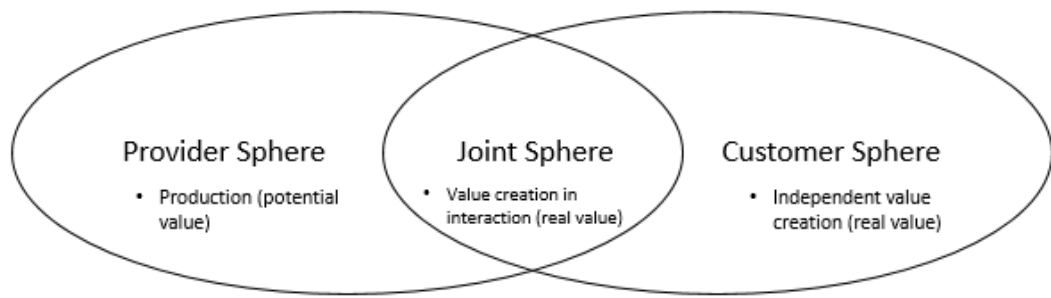


Figure 4: Value Creation Spheres (Adopted from Grönroos & Voima (2013))

Indirect interaction, which occurs either in the provider or customer sphere, is the use of an output from the provider, such as a product or an autonomous test of a software. Furthermore, information search of potential providers and their offerings is considered indirect interaction. Outside the joint sphere, the provider is a value facilitator, meaning that they provide potential value that might turn into real value (value in-use). This is similar to the value propositions made by the provider, which for example Gentile et al. (2007) discuss (Figure 3). In the provider sphere, resources that can potentially be used by the customer for value creation, are formed by the provider. (Grönroos & Voima, 2013)

The customer is a value creator in the customer sphere, meaning that value in-use is created, compared to the potential value in-use in the provider sphere, even though interaction is indirect in the customer sphere as well. General examples of such actions is the information search of potential providers, or the independent or collective (not including the provider) testing of a solution. Only in the joint sphere, do the roles potentially shift and both the customer and provider become co-creators. This also means that the misconception of the provider only being capable of making value propositions, which can happen with the general model by Gentile et al. (2007) (Figure 3), should be reconsidered according to Grönroos & Voima (2013) to also include the possibility of co-creating value in the joint sphere through direct interaction. (Grönroos & Voima, 2013)

2.2.2 Customer Experience of Sales Interaction

As mentioned, the customer experience is affected by all the direct and indirect interaction between the customer and the service provider (Gentile et al., 2007;

Homburg et al., 2017; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; Sousa & Voss, 2006), meaning that it involves multiple phases such as purchase, search, consumption, and implementation, and spans across more than one channel and touchpoint. This indicates just how holistic the measurement of customer experience needs to be, and how the emotions involved by the customer in each step of the journey might vary.

In addition to being positively related to competitive advantage, Gentile et al., (2007) sum up that customers want positive customer experiences regardless of the context. Understanding how customer experience is formed and how it can be affected is therefore of great relevance for the provider of a product or service. As mentioned, the interactions between the organization and customer are what generates customer experience. Therefore, a beneficial approach on how to study customer experience is through the touchpoints with either the product or the company (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016).

A touchpoint is described as any encounter with the product or service that the customer has at any point in time (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016). It can happen in any channel, meaning that for example searching information in the pre-purchase phase is considered a touchpoint as well. By understanding and analysing the customer touchpoints a company can, to some extent, influence the customer experience, which is completely subjective and dependent on the customer.

In their study, which studies the customer journey in a retailing context, Stein & Ramaseshan (2016) identify six distinctive customer experience touchpoint elements, which are: “atmospheric, technological, communicative, process, employee–customer interaction, customer–customer interaction and product interaction elements”, with the possibility that a single touchpoint may consist of one or many of those elements.

Rawson et al. (2013) similarly agree that customer experience are the cumulative experiences of the customer, which are formed through touchpoints. Yet, criticism towards concentration only on single touchpoints is also presented, as there is the danger of forgetting the customer journey as a whole. This is especially the case when the managing of the customer is handed over to another function or person within the providing company (Rawson et al., 2013).

As a single touchpoint, be it simply the search of information over the internet regarding a potential business partner, adds up to the whole customer journey, the sales phase is similarly a single, though bigger, part of the whole customer experience, in the case of a long-standing relationship between a supplier and a customer. Therefore, stating that customer experience during the sales phase is a single entity, and neglecting the importance of for example the hand-over is short sighted. Customer experience during the sales phase forms from the same factors as with other phases, and the measurement of it should be done similarly than measuring customer experience in any other phase. Especially important are the direct, and indirect, interactions the customer and salesperson have.

Furthermore, the customer experience can be seen as a value co-creation phenomenon, with the customer and provider together creating new information (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014), and the customer constantly responding to the interactions in different, such a cognitive and emotional, manner (Gentile et al., 2007). When it comes to the sales phase, depending on the interactions that happen between the seller and customer, different type of value can be co-created.

2.3. Communication Media

Thus far, the literature review has concentrated on describing sales interaction and customer experience both generally, and during the sales phase. As interaction is in the heart of sales work and the formation of customer experience, and the thesis focuses on the digitalization of sales interaction meaning the differences of selling depending on the communication medium, reviewing communication media literature is relevant. In the Oxford English Dictionary, medium is described as “a means or channel of communication or expression” (OED Online, 2017). Therefore, theories of communication media offer the means to understand how the change of the communication channel affects communication performance and dynamics.

Communication means the “process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding” (Rogers, 1986, p. 199). Communication media theories study this phenomenon, a central theme of the whole thesis, and the effect different media have on it. Communication performance means achieving shared understanding (Dennis et al, 2008). As communication always

involves at least two participants, this shared understanding is not only how one individual understands information, but also how that individual interprets that other people understand that same information (Dennis et al, 2008). As the communication media might change, studying how communication performance is affected by this change is naturally of interest.

Communication media has been studied from many different perspectives, concentrating both on the different characteristics of a certain medium with theories such as Media Richness Theory (MRT) (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and Channel Expansion Theory (CET) (Carlson & Zmud, 1999) as well as on the cognitive aspects (Hrastinski, 2008). According to MRT, the richness of media depends on four criteria: multiple cues, rapidity of feedback, language variety and personal focus. In other words, face-to-face communication is the richest, since feedback is instant, the possibilities for language are plenty, the message can be personalized and cues, such as tone of voice or facial expressions, exist (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Dennis & Valacich, 1999).

Furthermore, according to MRT, whether the use of rich media is required depends on the situation the communication occurs in, more precisely on the levels of uncertainty and equivocality (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Dennis & Valacich, 1999). Uncertainty of the situation means that there is a set of responses that the communication partners are aware of, but information is missing. Leaner media suits these situations, as the required information is provided in a simple manner. Vice versa, with equivocal tasks, where there can be various interpretations to the situation, richer media, such as face-to-face interaction, is required according to MRT. (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Dennis & Valacich, 1999)

Yet, the linkage that with uncertain situation leaner media results in better performance, and with equivocal tasks richer media performs better, has been tested and criticized (Dennis & Valacich, 1999). Those variables lack the influence of context, which is common with media trait theories, of which MRT is one of the most known. As Dennis & Valacich (1999) note, in addition to a single media and its capabilities, the task, individuals and the social context in which the interaction takes place differs. Stating that a single media, such as face-to-face communication, is the richest in every situation is false.

CET took a step to a better direction by stating how the richness of a medium is dependent also on the context, such as the previous use of a media and the communication partner or the topic in question (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). CET makes some very intuitive claims such as that prior experience with the communication partner increases the richness of a communication channel. For individuals, the perception of richness can vary even with the same channel depending on the situation. Nevertheless, CET lacks the same aspects as MRT, meaning that as a media trait theory it concentrates on the richness of the media, but lacks direct implications for the performance of a certain media (Dennis et al., 2008).

Media Synchronicity Theory (MST) attempt to answer many of these shortcomings, acknowledging how there is more to media than simply the richness of it (Dennis & Valacich, 1999; Dennis et al., 2008). MST builds on media trait theories such as MRT, but attempts to answer the connection between communication media and performance, meaning how well shared understanding between the communication partners is achieved. According to MST, all communication tasks consist of two processes in the end: conveyance of information meaning the transmission of your message, and convergence of meaning which stands for processing and understanding the message (Dennis et al., 2008). Nevertheless, convergence and conveyance require both processing and transmission, but with different emphasis (Dennis et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2016).

As Figure 5 below suggests, MST implies that the fit of a media is dependent on many factors, such as media capabilities (extensions of the four dimensions of MRT (Dennis & Valacich, 1999)) which affect media synchronicity, communication processes and appropriation factors. Synchronicity, according to Dennis et al. (2008), is the “the ability to support individuals working together at the same time with a shared pattern of coordinated behavior”. Furthermore, using asynchronous media, such as e-mail in a synchronous manner does not mean, that the medium achieves “true synchronicity”. Conveyance processes generally require lower synchronicity than convergence processes (Dennis et al., 2008).

This fit influences both communication and task performance (Dennis et al., 2008). The media capabilities consist of both transmission capabilities (transmission velocity, symbol sets, parallelism) and processing capabilities (reprocessability, rehearsability,

symbol sets). Out of those, transmission velocity increases synchronicity together with symbol sets, albeit them being natural. Parallelism, rehearsability, and reprocessability on the other hand reduce synchronicity. (Dennis et al., 2008)

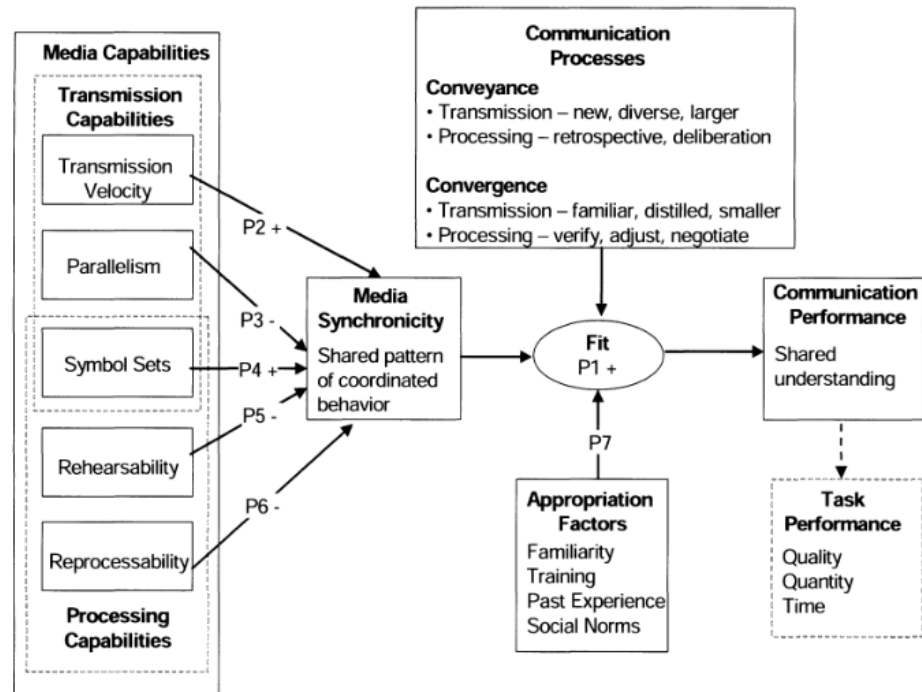


Figure 5. Media Synchronicity Theory (Dennis et al., 2008)

Wang et al. (2016) interpret MST so that communication performance is ultimately dependent on how well the media capabilities, which affect media synchronicity, match the communication process that is happening. These capabilities stand for the “the potential structures provided by a medium which influences the manner in which individuals can transmit and process information” (Dennis et al., 2008). As mentioned, and shown in the Figure 5 above, they either increase or reduce the synchronicity of media. These media capabilities are summed up in the table 3 below:

Table 3: Media Capabilities (Dennis & Valacich, 1999; Dennis et al., 2008)

<i>Transmission velocity</i>	<i>Parallelism</i>	<i>Symbol Sets</i>	<i>Rehearsability</i>	<i>Reprocessability</i>
Speed of feedback and support of bidirectional communication	Amount of simultaneous communication partners that can exist effectively	Encoding possibilities, such as physical cues - "Media richness"	Possibility to rehearse the message prior to sending	Possibility to process the message after receiving
Increases synchronicity	Reduces synchronicity	Increases synchronicity	Reduces synchronicity	Reduces synchronicity

Transmission velocity means the speed that a message can be sent from the sender to the intended receiver. Parallelism stands for the amount of simultaneous communications that is supported by the medium. Symbol sets are the amount of different encoding possibilities that a medium enables. Rehearsability is the extent that the sender can rehearse the message prior sending it. Reprocessability, therefore, is the possibility for the receiver to process and review a message after receiving it. (Dennis & Valacich, 1999; Dennis et al., 2008)

As mentioned, according to MST, all communication processes are formed of two aspects, conveyance and convergence. Regarding the conveyance of information, media with lower synchronicity has a better fit, as the focus is on the transmission of the message, and the communication partners need not work simultaneously, but rather concentrate more on understanding and processing the information. Vice versa, with convergence, media with higher synchronicity is important, as it enables rapid feedback and reduces delays in verifying certain aspects. (Dennis et al., 2008)

With a high level of synchronicity, and rapid feedback, the amount of information that can be sent simultaneously, has to be smaller. With lower synchronicity, bigger quantities of information can both be sent and processed (Dennis et al., 2008; Robert & Dennis, 2005). Robert & Dennis (2005) also suggest that this works the other way around, meaning that if there is a large quantity of information, individuals would rather receive it via an asynchronous channel. Otherwise, the message will most likely

be ignored, or the recipient will wait and search for further cues. With asynchronous communication, the time to process increases, and the need and motivation to respond quickly, according to Robert & Dennis (2005) decreases. Vice versa, media with high synchronicity has also a higher level of motivation, as the communication requires high levels of attention and presence.

Appropriation factors such as training for the use of a media, the familiarity with the communication partners and positive social norms regarding the media increase the probability of the media being appropriated accordingly (Dennis et al., 2008). Furthermore, good appropriation lowers the need for synchronicity between communication partners, compared to a situation with less familiarity with for example the experience of the media. Appropriation factors, adapted from the general framework by Dennis et al. (2008), are further examined in the table below:

Table 4: Appropriation factors (Dennis et al., 2008)

<i>Training</i>	<i>Past Experience</i>	<i>Familiarity</i>	<i>Social Norms</i>
Past training of using the media	Prior experience of using the media	Familiarity with the communication partner	For example organizational culture regarding communication

Many of the appropriation factors are linked to one another, such as training to use the media correctly, and past experience using that certain medium. Similarly, it is intuitive that being familiar with your communication partner enhances the likelihood that the medium is appropriated accordingly. Furthermore, social norms of for example an organization affect the use, meaning that if using email to handle a certain task is embedded in the culture of the company then it most likely has to be handled via email. (Dennis et al., 2008)

Overall MST offers a good theory for understanding the different factors that affect communication performance and how it is related to context e.g. type of medium, communication partner, and communication process. With the acknowledgment of media capabilities, for example the assumption that face-to-face communication is always the richest, as MRT implies, can be neglected, as it does not offer for example

reprocessability or rehearseability. Furthermore, the paradox between the processing and transmission of information is enhanced, as the media that supports transmission often lacks the same support for processing of information. Therefore, choosing a set of media for a task might turn out most beneficial.

Often, in literature, MRT or MST is used to explain media choice, though the primary use of the theories is meant to be about explaining communication performance (Dennis et al., 2008). Similarly, in this thesis, these theories are applied to explain communication performance. It can naturally be assumed, that performance and choice of media are linked, as the target of individuals is forming shared understanding. Yet, as explained later in this thesis, MST is used to understand the drivers of digitalization of sales, and how communication performance during the sales process is linked with the current knowledge of communication media literature.

2.4. Synthesis of the Literature Review

In Figure 6 the linkages between the themes, which are expanded from the ones that are portrayed in Figure 1 in the beginning of the literature review, are shown. These themes are sales, value co-creation, interaction, customer experience and communication media. To sum up, sales interaction or selling, which in this thesis are the person-to-person selling actions, are dependent on the interactions between the seller and customer (Cant & Van Heerden, 2005; Terho et al., 2012; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015; Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Customer experience is derived from the interaction, or touchpoints, that the customer has with the product or service, and the people behind it (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Gentile et al., 2007; Homburg et al., 2017; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; Rawson et al., 2013; Sousa & Voss, 2006; Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2009).

Value co-creation is the value created through the interaction between an organization and their customer (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Gentile et al., 2007; Terho et al., 2012; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). As Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015) state, co-creation without interaction is not possible. With value-based selling, value is co-created during the interactions of the selling phase (Terho et al., 2012; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). Similarly, the customer experience is a co-creation phenomenon as it is linked with value co-creation through

the interactions between the customer and the provider (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Gentile et al., 2007).

Communication media literature is linked to interaction, as it is used as the theory to explain how communication is affected depending on the communication medium. The theories that were reviewed, such as Media Synchronicity Theory, explain for example communication performance, meaning how well shared understanding is formed (Dennis et al., 2008). Therefore, the linkage is with interaction, as the theories offer a way how to analyze the differences of sales interaction between the salesperson and customer, and what can be the possible challenges that the communication partners face.

The similarities are not limited to the ones show in Figure 6. For example, Mantrala et al. (2012) argue, that digitalization, and the increased amount of information that is at the disposal of buyers, means that the role of selling is moving towards transactional or value based. Similar assumptions were made by for example Zahay et al. (2015). Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2017) studied value co-creation during the interactions between the customer and seller in the selling phase, and identify transactional and relationship value as the value that is co-created depending on the context.

Overall, the themes covered in the literature review attempt to help the reader understand the themes of the thesis, and how each area of literature can be used to support the study of the focal phenomenon. With communication media theories, a bottom-up approach on what sort of communication processes each medium supports, and how the sales communication process should therefore be managed, can be done. Customer experience, as it is formed of the direct and indirect interaction between the customer and an organization, is a beneficial concept to further analyze, how the digitalization of sales interaction affects the experiences of the customer during the sales phase.

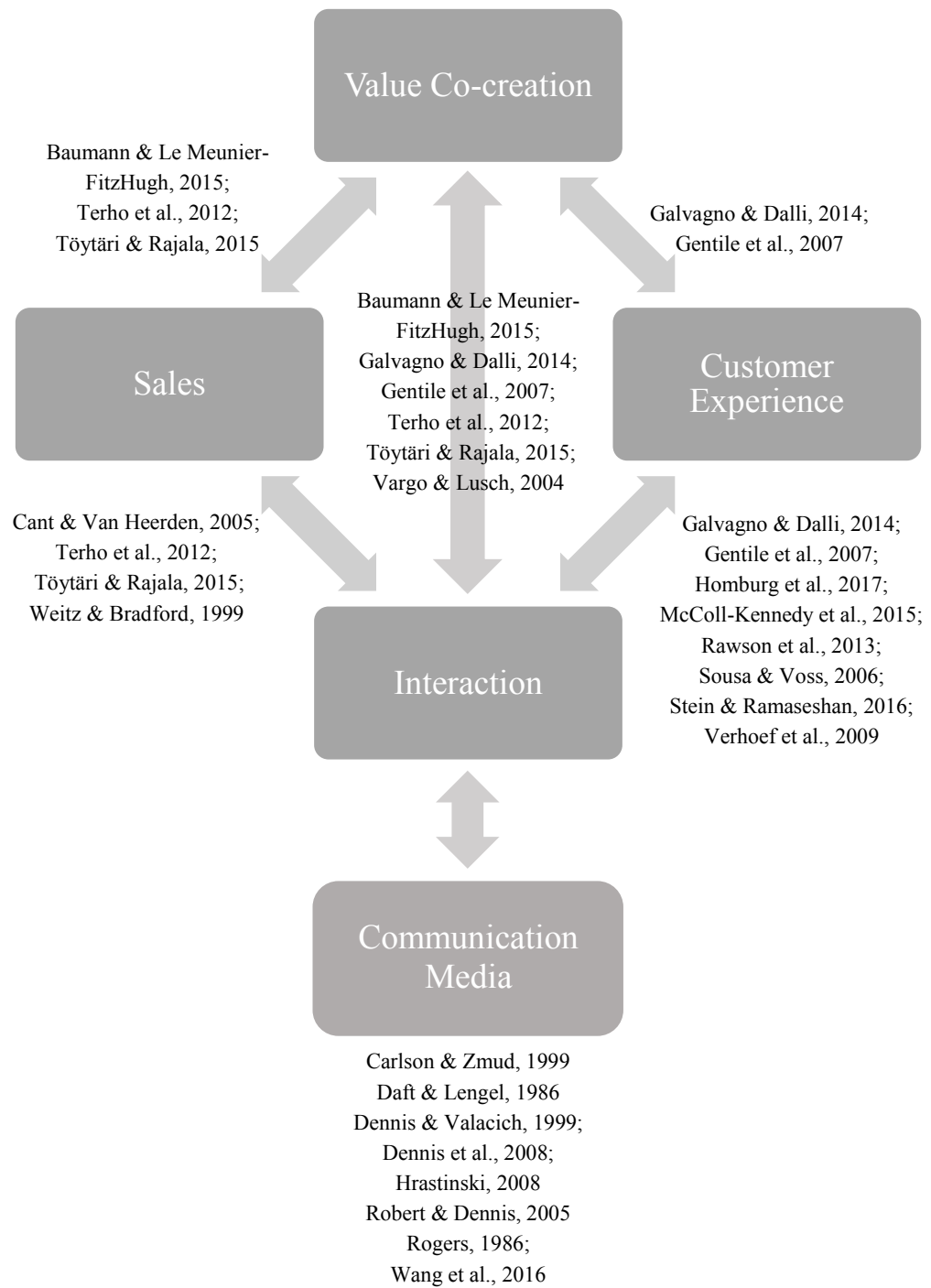


Figure 6. Literature review synthesis

3. Research Method

3.1. Case Company Selection

The case company of this study, Movenium, which is one of the participating companies of DICIA (Aalto University – School of Science, 2016; Haaga-Helia, 2016), offers digital solutions for managing construction sites, therefore operating in the IT industry, but with a strong linkage to the construction industry as well. This software as a service (SaaS) includes features from basic time tracking of construction site workers to more advanced personal quality standards and integrations with other software applications. There is a subscription price for the service starting from 39€ a month, with the most complex solutions costing around 150€ per month. Each individual user also costs seven extra euro per month. (Movenium, 2017)

Movenium was founded in 2005, with the company's founder having a background in the construction industry. Experiencing first-hand how frustrating all the unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy can be generated the idea for the software as a service. The service aims to reduce the amount of paperwork that construction sites traditionally need to handle, by moving different tasks to be computed and reported in the cloud, which Movenium operates. These tasks range from time tracking of employees to task management and worksite diaries. (Movenium, 2017)

The current customer base covers approximately 1500 companies, located mainly in Finland and Sweden. Majority of the customers operate in the construction industry, with Movenium estimating a 35-40% share of the Finnish market. Furthermore, as the service is highly scalable, the sizes of the customer companies vary from major industry players to smaller companies with only under five employees or users. (Movenium, 2017)

During 2016, Movenium combined forces with Visma Software Oy, which is a bigger Nordic company offering software services, ERP-systems as well as consultation regarding IT-projects (Visma Software Oy, 2017). Movenium continues operating as an independent company, but the partnership with Visma offers synergies with integrations regarding some of the current Visma builds. As an example, moving the information to another system operated by or under Visma is free for the users of

Movenium, whereas building an interface with other systems costs at least 450€. (Movenium, 2017)

In 2015, initiated by the CEO of Movenium, the sales strategy began its shift to the digital channel. In 2016, the current head of sales was appointed to further implement the strategic vision of the CEO, with customer interaction during the sales process happening by phone and with a shared computer screen for demonstrating the service. Development and refining of the concept is ongoing, and during the gathering of empirical data (10/2016-10/2017), the sales process involved a phone call with the customer, and a shared screen with an interactive presentation of the service powered by a business presentation software. Additionally, the head of sales told us that two different software for both lead generation and prospecting were used, and the sales people also use a customer relationship management (CRM) solution.

The need for the novel sales concept was initiated according to the CEO from the big growth of demand in Sweden. The legislation there changed significantly and the need for services such as the one with Movenium were far and between. To answer this spike in demand, new approaches had to be done, since the number of sales people were too small to answer every request face-to-face. Once the concept had been implemented the results were solid, and the approach was also implemented in Finland. This approach has reduced the need for the traditional sales approach of meeting the customer personally.

Currently, as the innovation is still rather new, final numbers on the impact on sales and revenue are still refined, but the initial data seems promising. Even though the amount of sales meeting and contacts has gone up thanks to the increased mobility and availability, the rate of successful sales has not fallen down, but vice versa, grown as well. Data from mid-2017 suggest that both the amount of sales meetings and activities have gone up, with 2.3 and 4.5 times respectively. Per salesperson, the won deals have risen to 46%, and the closing time has been reduced to 14 days, according to Movenium.

3.2. Data Collection

The research method of the thesis is a qualitative study. Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted, lasting between 13-41 minutes, depending greatly on the

interviewee and how much they had to say regarding the topic. The first fourteen interviews were done with the customers of Movenium, and the last three to the CEO, the head of sales and one seller from Movenium. Most of the customer companies that were interviewed work in the construction industry. However, there were a few exceptions, and those companies industries are labeled as “Other”, to ensure their anonymity, since there are currently so few companies from other industries that they could potentially be traced simply based on the industry, which concerned the interviewees. The details of each interview can be seen in the table 5.

Out of the seventeen interviews fifteen were conducted by meeting face-to-face, which was the primary target as the dialogue and interaction during the interview becomes richer, especially regarding the fairly abstract topic of the study. However, two of the interviews (C10 & C11) were conducted by phone, as it was the only possibility for the interviewees to participate. Furthermore, all of the interviews apart from interview C14 were recorded and fully transcribed. Precise notes were written during and immediately after the interview C14, to support and add validity to the analysis.

The fourteen interviewed customers of Movenium are all currently their customers, as they were more interested in telling about their experiences regarding the interactions with Movenium compared with for example failed sales cases. Furthermore, their insight also assisted in understanding the premises of successful interaction, both in the face-to-face and digital channel.

The interactions that are categorized under those three sets have to be explicitly about the sales processes. A simple phone call that concentrates on setting a date for a future meeting is not considered a sales process interaction under these categories, even though it might happen during the selling phase and before any contracts have been made and affect the customer experience overall. To keep the analysis and scope of thesis feasible, the interactions that are used to categorize the interviewees are strictly about the selling interaction. Furthermore, the training to use the software that Movenium offers for a fee is not considered a part of the selling phase, as it happens after the purchase has already been made. The interviewees were questioned about it though, but it is not considered an interaction of the selling phase.

Furthermore, digital sales meetings had been taped on video during the project. Three of these videos, as listed in table 5, were watched and analyzed to further give insight on the interactions during the sales process. These recordings show the screen that is used to demo the solution to the customer, and both the voice of the customer and seller are heard. Above all, the video tapes are used as supportive data, to further add validity to the analysis, and to give insight on for example the different sales approaches that the sellers make, and how these translate to concrete actions.

Table 5: Interview details

Customer Interviews							
Code	Interview Date	Interview Duration	Interview Type	Company Industry	Number of Interactions During the Sales Process	Number of F2F Interactions	Number of Digital Interactions
C1	10.5.2017	34min	F2F	Construction	3	1	2
C2	17.5.2017	15min	F2F	Construction	3	3	
C3	18.5.2017	41min	F2F	Construction	4	1	3
C4	19.5.2017	39min	F2F	Other	5	5	
C5	26.5.2017	17min	F2F	Other	3		3
C6	31.5.2017	26min	F2F	Construction	1	1	
C7	31.5.2017	17min	F2F	Construction	3		3
C8	1.6.2017	13min	F2F	Construction	3	3	
C9	2.6.2017	26min	F2F	Other	3	3	
C10	6.6.2017	14min	Phone	Construction	2		2
C11	7.6.2017	17min	Phone	Construction	1	1	
C12	12.6.2017	15min	F2F	Construction	3		3
C13	19.6.2017	18min	F2F	Construction	4	4	
C14	24.7.2017	40min	F2F	Construction	1		1
Case Company Interviews							
Code	Interview Date	Interview Duration	Interview Type	Position at Movenium			
M1	14.8.2017	55min	F2F	Head of Sales			
M2	14.8.2017	40min	F2F	CEO			
M3	18.8.2017	29min	F2F	Sales Manager			
Video Recordings of the Digital Sales Meetings							
Code	Recording Date	Record Duration					
V1	30.1.2017	35min					
V2	12.5.2017	29min					
V3	30.11.2016	36min					

3.3. Analysis

The analysis of the interview data was done using systematic combining, which was developed by Dubois & Gadde (2002), and described as: “a process where theoretical

framework, empirical fieldwork, and case analysis evolve simultaneously, and it is particularly useful for the development of new theories”. This approach suits an interpretive research design well, as there nothing is taken for granted, and both the understandings of theory as well as the own understanding of the researcher evolve throughout the process (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Interpretive research designs are often linked to abductive reasoning in organization science literature, which is the case with this thesis as well (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013).

Systematic combining was considered beneficial for the setting in this thesis for multiple reasons: First, this case study moved back and forth between empirical findings and theory from the start which common with systematic combining. The input in the form of the customer interview questions and overall guidance from more experienced researchers offered some direction for the thesis and the theories that were used. Furthermore, this approach allows the researcher to gain insight on both empirical data and theory simultaneously. Also, having a linkage to current theories regarding the themes that emerged facilitate the analysis, and keep the findings and case setting concise and relevant. Finally, the approach that systematic combining uses is abductive, which is closer to inductive than deductive, and is useful when new findings and theory is expected to be developed (note the difference to generated as with for example grounded theory which is a common approach to an inductive design) from the empirical findings made during the case study (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013)

3.3.1 Categorization of Findings

To begin this abductive process, each of the interviews was fully transcribed (apart from the interview with C14, as recording the interview was not successful) and read in order to form categories, which could be used to analyze the data. As mentioned earlier, 14 customers of Movenium were interviewed, some of which had communicated face-to-face during the selling process, and some of which used the digital selling concept. The interview questions, which can be seen in Appendix 1 and 2, attempted to understand what the reasons behind the choices that the customers preferred a certain medium over the other was, and what the experiences of the sales process were like.

On a more specific level, the interviews focused on a few topics of interest. Experiences regarding the selling process were asked. Depending on the context and customer path the interviewee had gone through, the aim was to find out what were the challenges and advantages of the communication medium the customer had used during the sales process. Furthermore, the goal was to identify insight that was not too dependent on the context, such as the size of the customer company, or the age of the interviewee.

The interviewees were given room to speak, which meant that no theories or assumptions were tested as such. All examples regarding situations, when the interviewee felt that the digital channel was insufficient were discussed. As some of the interviewed customers have not gone through the digital sales channel, the interviews focused also on what are the reason why some customers would rather interact face-to-face, and could those meetings have possibly been arranged in the digital channel. Furthermore, if the interviewees felt that there were certain factors that eased the communication in the digital channel those factors were discussed.

The categories that emerged from the data were the customer experiences regarding the sales process with Movenium and the factors that drive the digitalization of sales. Movenium gives autonomy to the customers over the preferred communication medium, and how they wish to proceed with the purchasing process. That is why it is valuable to understand what were the reasons that some customers choose to interact using a digitalized channel, while others wish to meet face-to-face. Having formed the high-level categories, which guide the analysis, sub-categories emerged of which all meaningful contributions and quotes were translated and presented in the analysis. The source of the quotation is mentioned by the interview code, to offer transparency to the analysis, without compromising the anonymity of the interviewed professional.

Dubois & Gadde (2002) suggest using a “tight and evolving framework” to guide the analysis. It enables both setting a clear guideline from where to begin, but also allows the empirical findings to further elaborate the theory and build up new dimensions and interpretations of it. Having a clear linkage or starting point from literature also ensures that the findings stay relevant and offer value. Furthermore, it ensures that the process is iterative by nature, and not linear, which is rarely possible with case studies (Dubois & Gibbert, 2010).

The framework by Gentile et al. (2007) together with the findings by Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015) regarding transactional and relationship value guided the analysis of the customer experiences, and the framework regarding Media Synchronicity Theory by Dennis et al. (2008) the analysis of the factors driving the digitalization of sales. However, the frameworks or theories were only used as guidelines and building blocks, but not tested as such. As Mantere & Ketokivi (2013) note: “deduction is an inference to a particular observation (or case), induction an inference to a generalization, and abduction an inference to an explanation.”

4. Findings

The Findings are separated into two categories according to the ones formed in the previous section: Identifying the drivers for the digitalization of sales and the customer experiences of the digitalized selling process. The former category concentrates on the characteristics of selling interactions in the case study and how digitalization affects those interactions. It attempts to answer especially the main research question and the sub-question 2. The latter category aims to answer specifically sub-question 1. The emphasis is on what the customer perceive as valuable, depending on the medium the interaction happened on, and what are the key differences between these customer groups.

- What factors drive the digitalization of sales interaction?
 - 1) How does the digitalization of sales interaction affect customer experience?
 - 2) How should the communication process be set up to support the digitalization of sales interaction?

For the analysis of drivers of digitalization of sales, a conceptual model based on Media Synchronicity Theory (2008) is formed. The conceptual model is used to analyze and understand how the communication process should be set up so that it supports the sales interaction. Then the customer interviews are analyzed according to this model, and how well the different aspects can be found, though room for new findings to emerge is also left. Eventually a synthesis of both the model and findings of the interviews is presented. With the analysis of customer experiences, the approach is more data-driven, but once again, a reference point from literature, which is common for an abductive approach, is used. The conceptual model of the formation of customer experience by Gentile et al. (2007), combined with the findings by Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015) are central themes of the analysis.

What combines both categories is how value is eminent during the analysis. With the first section, value, or the lack of it, is analyzed for example from the perspective of how the sellers of Movenium communicate value during the sales process, and how customers either receive these propositions or let them go past. With the latter section,

value is analyzed from the perspective how it was formed during the customer experience of the selling process itself. Understanding what makes the digitalized sales concept valuable for the customer and the seller, or is there a significant lack of value depending on the communication medium, is of interest.

4.1. Factors Driving the Digitalization of Sales

4.1.1 Conceptual Model based on Media Synchronicity Theory

Media Synchronicity Theory by Dennis et al. (2008) is the theory that is used to help analyze the factors that drive the digitalization of sales. As described in the literature review, there are multiple factors that affect the fit of a communication medium, and therefore the performance of that channel. The elements that are highlighted in this analysis section relate especially to the convergence and conveyance of the communication subject. The factors that either highlight the need for convergence, which usually demands meeting face-to-face, are searched, similarly to factors that make it easier for the communication partners to use a digitalized channel are pointed out. Media capabilities are analyzed to understand the level of synchronicity they offer, on a theoretical level, as it implies how well the medium supports conveyance and convergence processes.

Furthermore, appropriation factors, such as past training of using the communication channel, are also taken into account. As MST analyzes communication performance, the model is not used to analyze media choice as such. However, it is acknowledged that forming a shared understanding often guides the choice of media, but the focus of the analysis are the drivers that effect communication performance. (Dennis et al., 2008)

With the case company of this thesis, the communication media of the sales process can be divided into two categories: face-to-face communication and the “digital sales concept” which is basically selling over phone and with the help of a shared screen for giving the customer a demo of the service. Below in table 6 the effect these two different media have on their media capabilities, and therefore media synchronicity, are presented:

Table 6: Media Capabilities of the Digital Sales Concept and Face-to-Face Sales (Adopted from Dennis et al., 2008)

<i>Transmission velocity</i>	<i>Parallelism</i>	<i>Symbol Sets</i>	<i>Reherseability</i>	<i>Reprocessability</i>
<i>Digital Sales Concept</i>				
High	Low	Medium	Low	Low
<i>Face-to-Face Sales</i>				
High	Medium-Low	High	Low	Low

Transmission velocity, which increases synchronicity, is high with both mediums, as feedback is rapid. The parallelism is higher with face-to-face communication, as the digital sales concept does not support synchronous communication of multiple participants that well. This aspect reduces synchronicity. Symbol sets are richer with face-to-face communication, as it allows for example all the visual cues, and therefore increases synchronicity more than with the digital sales concept. The reprocessability and reherseability of both sales concepts are rather low, unless you account for the demo that the seller gives regarding the service, as it can be rehearsed beforehand and reprocessed afterwards. This means that the synchronicity of the media is not reduced that much in either occasion. Overall, as the tables suggest, the media capabilities of face-to-face selling supports higher media synchronicity than the digital sales concept.

Once the assumptions regarding media capabilities have been made, the type of communication processes they support are of interest: Generally, as Dennis et al. (2008) argue, conveyance processes require less synchronous communication than convergence. According to the media capabilities, the digital selling concept supports less synchronous communication than face-to-face selling. This would suggest, that the communication process of the digital selling concept should concentrate more on the conveyance of information, than convergence. Offering information for the customers so, that they can process them individually, and on their own time, is more likely to be successful, from the media capabilities perspective. The emphasis, according to Dennis et al. (2008), is more on the processing of information, than transmission, with conveyance processes.

With face-to-face selling, the synchronicity is higher, and therefore the media capabilities support convergence processes better, mainly because of the higher amount of symbol sets. This means that with tasks during the sales process that require rapid transmission of information, with lower emphasis on processing of that information, would require face-to-face communication. Whenever there is a situation, that involves discussion on an abstract topic, and there is a higher likelihood of misunderstanding, these can be handled better by communicating face-to-face.

With media appropriation factors, the need for synchronicity is reduced (Dennis et al., 2008). This means, that by taking into account those factors, the digital sales concept can overcome some of the challenges it might otherwise face, with situation that require high synchronicity. Perhaps the most relevant ones, in light of the case study, is finding out if the customer has used this sort of communication medium beforehand, and to what extent. Similarly, if the social norms the customer is accustomed to either promote or hinder the use of such media for the task at hand can be valuable information, when the seller considers how to proceed with the process. In other words, if the culture of the customer company supports trying out new ways of interacting with suppliers, the likelihood that the media is appropriated accordingly increases. Vice versa, if there is a rigid sourcing process involving face-to-face meetings, which has to be followed to the points, the success of digitalized selling is unlikely.

4.1.2 Drivers for Online Sales Interaction

A significant finding during the interviews was how differently customers who interacted mainly or only in the digital channel were concerned with the communication medium during the purchasing process, compared to customers who wanted to meet the seller face-to-face. To highlight the difference, they were simply interested in solving the issues they had, and as long as a dialogue with Movenium could be formed that would be as easy and effortless as possible, they were happy. In contrast, the other customers were often eager to meet face-to-face, and any other form of communication would not come to question.

During the customer interviews, it seemed that having some grasp of the service beforehand influenced the choice of the medium that was used. All four customers who had not met anyone from Movenium face-to-face had some understanding about

the service beforehand, which clearly made it easier for them to interact using the digital channel. There were a few ways how to gain this experience and form a shared context with the seller well in advance. By gaining this experience, the requirements for the convergence of information were smaller, as there was less requirements for rapid transmission, and more on processing.

For example, some buyers had used the service in some form before, for example in their previous work place. This naturally made the purchase process simpler, as they knew what they were purchasing, to some extent at least. Sufficient experience could also be gained by downloading the test version from the website and feeling out the service autonomously. Naturally, testing the service alone does not mean that the potential customer becomes an expert overnight, but having even a little grasp of what Movenium is offering helps both the customer and buyer communicate, and it also seems to allow them to overcome some of the difficulties that would otherwise require meeting face-to-face.

“Many other companies in the same industry use similar services, and there are multiple options on the market. I ended up with Movenium after inspecting it [the solution] from the internet and found it intuitive, in a way. There were some challenges initially as well, but I received assistance from Movenium regarding those concerns -- Yes, first I downloaded the trial by myself and started inspecting it on my own. I contacted Movenium afterward.” C12

By giving information that emphasizes conveyance over convergence, the lower synchronicity of the digital selling concept was not seen as problematic. Furthermore, it seemed that any prior knowledge of the system helped, just hearing positive customer experiences from colleagues, their own customers or suppliers, or even competitors. Knowing that the system is in use elsewhere and that it works seems to relieve some pressure that the purchaser might feel regarding the purchasing process. Overall, it could be sensed that the customer who interacted mainly in the digital channel were less concerned with the purchase as a process and seemed confident that the method how to acquire the service was more or less flexible. As long as they got their problems solved and their questions and concerns answered, they were satisfied.

“I hadn't personally used it [the solution], but a company we are in business with uses it. From them, we have constantly seen how it works, and the advantages it gives, and what the bottom line of it is” C10

“The functionalities of the service were the most important. In addition, we have been recruiting a lot of new workforce this year, and Movenium is known and used overall rather well, so it also eased the transition and had an effect.” C7

One of the identified drivers was the finding that the service was applicable as is. There was very little need to start making big modifications to the software, which could be seen in the straightforward purchasing process, and generally, a smaller amount of meetings were held during the process compared to a situation when the solution required significant modifications, and therefore a face-to-face meeting. This meant that the dialogue between the customer and Movenium did not become too abstract, but could concentrate on the current functionalities that the service offered, and how well these answered the needs of the customer. Being able to demo a relatively standard service, the convergence of information could be done in the online environment.

“It [the solution] worked on its own rather well. Well, there were a few settings and instructions that you can change so yes, we did make certain decisions regarding those. For example, how we set working hours, when does it start and begin, or do we just give a certain amount of hours, that it is from here to here. These type of basic settings.” C7

“We went through what kind of an offering it [the solution] is, and it is rather simple both the service and the device, and I felt afterward like I had understood everything” C5

This is one of the clearest linkages with low requirements for convergence, since there is the possibility for the customer to autonomously download the test-version of the solution, and if it works as-is, this processing of information can happen retrospectively and slower, as Dennis et al. (2008) describe conveyance processes. The fact that the digital selling concept might not support as synchronous communication

as face-to-face interaction is not as big of a factor, when the requirements for convergence are not too high.

Continuing with the factors that relieve pressure from the purchasing process, a multitude of the customers purchasing the solution through the digitalized channel were making a relatively small investment, acquiring the service only for ten users or less. This allowed, for example, the gathering of experiences and opinions from the end-users during the initial stages of the purchasing process. Nevertheless, usually the purchase was done rather autonomously in these cases, with the purchaser having a very strong say on already deciding which service to purchase, and how. Parallelism of the digital sales channel, or in other words the amount of parallel communication that it supported (Dennis et al., 2008), is low, meaning that it suited the single purchaser best. The purchasing process of the customer, if they even had any defined processes as such, adopted to the one Movenium offers smoothly.

“Beforehand, I had personally most likely used it [the solution] the most in our company, so it based mostly on my experiences and I also recommended it.” C7

To conclude, customers communicating mainly in the digital channel seemed mostly interested in the functionalities of the product and how well they responded to the current needs that they had. Seeing and meeting the people behind the service was less of an interest, whereas solving the problem was the main concern. The main emphasis was keeping the transmission of information at a level, that did not require too high of a level of convergence. The emphasis is more on the conveyance of information, having the required information ready and on demand, with the customers having the ability to process it on their own time and own pace.

This naturally affected the role of the seller as well, as the sort of selling behavior that is found in literature was missing. The process seemed to move forward so that it was quite strongly lead by the customer, and the task left for the seller was to answer questions and concerns that remained. There was lack of selling as such since the customer seemed to know what they wanted, they had acquired a rather good understanding what they were purchasing beforehand and simply wanted to know whether Movenium could answer these concerns.

“They were on the same wavelength right away. Even though they most likely serve many different companies, they also knew how to address a smaller company such as mine, and immediately reduced the amount of unnecessary functionalities, which there were plenty” C12

“It was the most important thing exactly, that it [the solution] was a suitable solution and service that worked and is easy to use. That was the thing. Otherwise, we would have chosen something else since it was not the cheapest one. But it was the best. -- We went shortly through everything, and then started using it ourselves. If something came up, we would be in touch -- In addition, we quickly discussed all the add-on possibilities to know what is available.” C10

“We just needed a simple and affordable solution quickly, that would get us started” C5

This transactional type of selling behavior is in line with the literature reviewed earlier in the thesis (Grewal et al., 2015; Mantrala & Albers, 2012; Zahay et al., 2015). As the amount of information at the disposal of the customer increases, the first contact happens later on in the sales process, with more and more research done by the customer autonomously. This “empowerment” of the customer transforms the sales actions towards a transactional bases when operating with a fixed solution, both according to the scholars (Grewal et al., 2015; Mantrala & Albers, 2012; Zahay et al., 2015) and to the analysis of the empirical data thus far.

4.1.3 Drivers for Offline Sales Interaction

There were seven interviewed customers who purchased the solution by communicating only face-to-face, and this group was defined by a more determined mindset on how they wanted to purchase the service that Movenium had to offer. In fact, all seven mentioned for a variety of reasons why they would require to meet the seller and representatives of Movenium face-to-face, of which most could be traced to the high need of convergence of information. A few of the interviewees mentioned, that this requirement stemmed partly from just being used to purchase in a B2B-context by meeting the seller personally, and stated that that is how they will most

likely continue operating in the future as well. The social norms they were accustomed to were rather dominant and offered little room for experimenting on new communication media.

“All of the meetings were held face-to-face. We definitely wouldn't have made the decision online -- We wanted to see their faces and those meetings were attended by the CEO, I'm not sure if he is the CEO right now, and also their CTO, and it was basically their competence and the quality of the product that affected the purchasing decision” C4

“Yes, we want to meet face-to-face. A service such as that, it is so dependent on the people behind it, who work on it. They are not automatic systems, but there is always a person behind it. -- If we trust the people, and the co-operation between the people works, then most likely our problems will be solved. In other cases you just get a ticket or other automatic responses to your email -- Once there has been unsolved problems for long enough, then you have to meet face-to-face if there are any misunderstandings behind it” C13

However, the bottom line seemed to be, that both parties had to communicate more complex and abstract themes and topics during the purchasing process, and it was preferred to be done face-to-face. This meant that the synchronicity of communication needed to be high, and the convergence of information required a face-to-face meeting. Partly the need for meeting personally was the fact that, from the beginning, the purchasing party attempted to form a sort of strategic partnership with Movenium. Usually, this was characteristic of bigger companies, since even though the initial purchase might only affect a smaller user base, the customer acknowledged that if they find a sound business partner in Movenium, the service could be further developed, and the user base grown.

“Well, it was definitely good that we met face-to-face and saw how they use it [the solution] and can develop it. It was the best. I do not think it would have succeeded over the phone or in some other manner. -- And when we mentioned our intention to develop the service further they told us that they wanted it as well, so giving them any suggestions was

welcome and then they estimated the schedule for such improvements. They have gotten many ideas from our own initial worksite diary, which they can pass on to other clients. So you could say that both parties have benefitted from this partnership, which is a good thing.” C11

The need to communicate face-to-face seemed to also depend on the size of investment that was being made. As C4 mentioned, when you purchase a service for over 100 daily users at once, there is a lot of interest and therefore pressure to get it right the first time around. As mentioned earlier, the digital sales concept does not support parallelism that well, meaning that meetings involving multiple people would rarely work that well with the current online communication method. Often with these bigger companies, there are also certain sourcing processes and guidelines that need to be met. The flexibility or enthusiasm to try a new communication medium is much lower than with digital customers.

“We were getting a system for hundreds of end-users on the worksites, so I would never have the courage to simply purchase it [the solution] based on those demos, which there are multitudes of on the internet once you google.” C4

Another driver for offline communication was the fact that the service that Movenium had to offer needed some or a lot of modification. Something in the customer company's needs required changes to the service, and communicating these needs and getting the assurance that they could be met was done face-to-face. Once again the emphasis of communication shifts in these situations from conveyance to convergence, with the requirements on adjusting, verifying and negotiating smaller quantities of information simultaneously with the communication partner.

If these requirements were coupled with a little to no experience or understanding about the service beforehand from the customer's side, it put a lot of pressure on the purchaser regarding the meetings with Movenium. In these cases, it seemed that digitalized meetings lacked the resources to answer the expectations put on the communication and solving the situation in favor of both parties. It was evident that when the customer had to both learn what the product could do, and communicate own

requirements simultaneously (emphasis on convergence), setting up a face-to-face meeting became quickly the way to proceed.

“But then there has been enough, sort of stereotypical, iterations regarding the calculations of wages, and it was good that it happened face-to-face since you have to really evaluate what does something mean, why does it count it that way, why does it look like this. Once we got into reducing those errors or inspecting the current situation, it was good that it happened that way.” C9

“If we see that there is the ability to deliver, there are also all the integrational needs that we have, which you cannot get ready. That is when you really have to see their faces and the ability to make those integrations.” C4

Furthermore, during the analysis of the video tapes of the sales meetings, it became clear that the presentation worked only one way. This meant, that the seller was able to show the user interface of their solution, how it worked, what were the functionalities and so forth. However, once the buyer begins to describe how their current processes and operations work, the only way to communicate it is by voice over the phone. Both describing, and especially understanding something so abstract, and trying to build the mental models of how the new built might look like is demanding, and often steers the sales process towards meeting face-to-face.

To sum up, the interaction between Movenium and customers who wanted to meet face-to-face was much closer to the traditional selling interactions identified in literature. The communication was similar to value-based selling, as the main task of the seller was to understand the requirements of the customer and make value propositions during the sales phase. Often, the topics that were discussed during these meetings were rather abstract, involving co-creational actions, and the customers were therefore interested in meeting face-to-face. This also meant, that the overall emphasis of the communication was on the convergence of information, which in these cases required offline meetings between the seller and buyer.

4.2. Analysis of the Customer Experience during the Sales Process

The goal of this section is to analyze the customer experience during the digital selling process. This gives direct implications for how the customer experience changes depending on the context and what are the valuable aspects of the sales process. Furthermore, the analysis also assists in forming managerial guidelines on how to design a digital selling process and possibly gain competitive advantage already during the sales phase.

Few of the interviewed customers found that the communication during the digital sales process became easily a monologue, where the seller talked about the offering and what it could do, and the customer listened. This is understandable, as the main emphasis of the digitalized sales process is about showing what the solution can do. The video recordings showed that after exchanging only small pleasantries, the seller quickly began showing the solution, and the buyers listened, and only briefly signaled acknowledgment of what had been showed.

Not seeing the seller was seen as challenging, since the customers felt it was hard to signal that they had a question or that some aspect should be revisited and gone through more thoroughly. Furthermore, the monologue nature meant that concentrating on the topic was hard for a long time, which also meant that in order to keep the meetings relevant, they needed to be short. 60 minutes was seen as some sort of mark that the communication could concentrate for before it became pointless and no further value would be generated though such an aspect is naturally individual and differs between the customers.

“Because, when we go things through on the phone and have a conversation, you always listen to someone, for long enough. You cannot interrupt them right away that hey, I thought about this and that. Of course, you could take notes, and then return to those, but in this case, it was all about following the demo and the screen the whole time, you cannot really do much else. -- So it is much easier to say to someone face-to-face that, hey, how about this, interrupt them and so on. -- Well it wasn't hard for me to listen, but of course, I noticed many times that

okay, now I'm thinking about this and that again, but I didn't want to interrupt the person.” C1

The video recordings support this assumption as well. For example in V3, the sales process begins with the seller stating that “*Well, this is how our solution looks like*”, after which the process continues for approximately five minutes with the customer listening and answering only when asked by simply stating “yes” to show acknowledgment. This approach was similar to all three videos that were analyzed, and understandable, as the focus is naturally on the solution that Movenium is selling. The other two videos follow the same pattern, with relatively little small talk between the seller and buyer in the beginning of the meeting, and the demo of the solution being the starting point of the process. Yet, it became evident, that if the solution was not suitable, or some key information is misunderstood, the process would run into trouble.

Based on the videos, after the demo, the seller would ask the customer how their current processes work, and the seller would begin describing their current operations. However, the selling process currently supports only one-way presentation, meaning that the customer is not able to show any user interfaces or other concrete screens or applications that are in use. The only way to tell, how the same functions that the solution by Movenium is also solving, such as time tracking of employees, are currently done is by describing them by voice. For example, if any integrational builds between the current software that the customer uses, and the one Movenium is selling need to be done, meeting face-to-face becomes more likely. Describing the complex technical builds require co-operation, focus and precision. Achieving this with the customer talking and describing their current operations in an approximate manner is difficult and often frustrating.

Connecting with the counterpart during a digital meeting was also seen as more demanding than meeting face-to-face. Once the only cue that you receive is voice, concentrating on the voice is the only way to maintain that connection. Eliminating other distractions was necessary for the sellers, which was seen during the digital meeting that was recorded on video. An example was a seller of Movenium, who disassembled and assembled a pen for the whole duration of the meeting, which seemed to ease the concentration on the voice and communication with the potential customer.

Similarly, during an online meeting, it seemed that there was a greater danger for the counterpart to lose interest, and the customer could easily become impatient.

A significant reason some customers were reluctant to use the digital selling concept seemed to be the challenge in processing and communicating a lot of information simultaneously. The customer experience they were after was sitting down face-to-face with the seller, and going through what the service could do, and what was the solution they were after. For example, C13 stated that because they were unable to find a common time that suited both parties for a meeting, they tried keeping it in the digital channel but with the same agenda. However, C13 came quickly to the conclusion that having the meeting without sitting down face-to-face was “practically impossible” since maintaining focus was too hard. This is in line with literature, as media with higher synchronicity and social presence also increase motivation to concentrate on the subject (Robert & Dennis, 2005).

“We have tried having some meetings that were postponed multiple times, or even weren't held at all, because we couldn't find a common suitable slot. So we tried it over the phone or some other manner but were not able to solve the issues that way. It was not until we met face-to-face that things were solved. I think it is the perfect concentration on the subject, when two people are in the same space, concentrating on each other. Otherwise, your thoughts and concentration might wonder elsewhere.” C13

The experiences mentioned above highlights well the challenge that Movenium faces when it comes to facilitating these digital meetings. How to make sure that the customer truly understands the demo, and that they are still concentrating. Even one of the biggest benefits that these digital meetings had (being able to respond quickly and flexibly to customer's needs) burdens a challenge since keeping the big picture in mind becomes difficult. Otherwise, there is the danger that the selling process slowly transforms into a sub-optimizing spiral.

“How I've understood this Skype, once I began using it five or six years ago, it affects interaction in my opinion by requiring a more rigid structure and management of meetings, compared to meeting physically.

Otherwise, the focus is lost from the group, and minor details gain too much attention unless someone is pointing constantly out what to focus on. Personally, I overemphasize where we are going and what are we discussing about. That is the challenge somewhat.” C4

The interviewees also mention that bigger projects can be handled online as well, as long as the people who are responsible acknowledge the managerial challenges that it brings about. A concrete suggestion was keeping the agenda of the online meeting visible the whole time as following the meeting becomes easier. That way the customer knows better what topics will be handled, and what the key takeaways regarding the meeting are.

“Overall, things have worked out rather well with them. Just perfect. It does not matter where we are going, the meetings were held in one way or another, some have been over the phone or on the road. Therefore, their behavior, during these times, has been exactly what it should be with a modern software company, meaning that they are able to react quickly. They hold a meeting and go through things. From the perspective of holding meetings, it has been good. Then, the challenges or areas for improvement are with managing a project of this magnitude. I feel like there was missing a managing force or a person, that would hold all the lines and keep things together. But it is more about bureaucracy in my opinion over how things are managed, not the interaction as such.” C4

What the customers appreciated above all about the digital selling concept was the flexibility and responsiveness it offered. Once both parties understood each other's needs and offerings, the digital concept helped on advancing quickly in the sales process whenever it was suitable for both parties. Furthermore, it showed that Movenium responded quickly to the concerns of the customer and that they genuinely cared. Handling all minor matters in the digital channel, instead of arranging a separate face-to-face meeting, which involved traveling and other less valuable aspects, was seen as very lean from the customer's point of view, and improved the customer experience significantly. The value of the digital selling concept is that it allows the customers to focus purely on the actions that produce value for them.

“So I was thinking, on my own behalf, that someone says 'hey, can I show you this product, would you like to come over to our office and look', and you think that well, do I have to, it takes one hour to get there to the meeting and back. -- Often I ask if we could meet over the internet for an hour, and if after that both parties feel like there is something fruitful going on, then we can meet face-to-face. Even with these software related matters I often want to see that do our interests align” C3

Overall, the value of the digital meeting was above all in the flexibility and efficiency that it offered for the customer. The customer experience was formed from receiving a solution to the identified needs that the customers had, and getting this solution effortlessly and as ready as possible. Naturally, the same aspects and positive traits interested the customers with more complex need as well, but they were more interested in forming the partnership, and therefore willing to spend more effort on building the solution, developing the partnership and communicating both their needs and getting assurance if those needs could be met. Investing in the communication during the selling phase was not an issue for those customers and their needs.

4.3. Synthesis

Table 7 below sums up the findings from the interview data, in relation to the categories that were formed. Overall findings are supported by a few illustrative quotes, which were reviewed thoroughly in the previous chapters. Further in tables 8 and 9 the findings are elaborated, and implications together with the literature that was also reviewed are made.

Table 7: Overall Findings and Illustrative Quotes of the Categories

<i>Category</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Illustrative Quotes</i>
<i>Digitalization of Interaction</i>		
Factors that drive online interaction – Managing lower synchronicity	Emphasis of the communication process on conveyance. The provider needs to offer information in a format that allows autonomous processing. For example offering the test-version for free is a good example.	<p>"I ended up with Movenium after inspecting it [the solution] from the internet and found it intuitive, in a way" C12</p> <p>"It [the solution] worked on its own rather well" C5</p> <p>"Beforehand, I had personally most likely used it [the solution] the most in our company, so it based mostly on my experiences and I also recommended it." C7</p>
Factors that drive offline interaction – the communication requires high synchronicity	There is an emphasis on convergence of information. For example, the solution requires modifying or there is a danger for misinterpreting important aspects. There is no room for mistakes, and the discussion topics are abstract.	<p>"Well, it was definitely good that we met face-to-face and saw how they use it [the solution] and can develop it" C11</p> <p>"We were getting a system for hundreds of end-users on the worksites, so I would never have the courage to simply purchase it [the solution] based on those demos, which there are multitudes of on the internet once you google." C4</p>
<i>Effects on Customer Experience</i>		
Advantages of the digital sales concept according to the customers	The digital sales concept was seen as an efficient, flexible and straightforward way of purchasing the service. The company image it left was caring and agile due to the responsiveness.	<p>"Often I ask if we could meet over the internet for an hour, and if after that both parties feel like there is something fruitful going on, then we can meet face-to-face" C3</p> <p>"Therefore, their behavior, during these times, has been exactly what it should be with a modern software company, meaning that they are able to react quickly. They hold a meeting and go through things." C4</p>
Challenges of the digital sales concept according to the customers	The customers expressed challenges in concentrating and interrupting the demo of the service, meaning that it easily became a monologue from the seller. There was also the danger of concentrating too much on details and forgetting the big picture.	<p>"It was all about following the demo and the screen the whole time, you cannot really do much else. -- So it is much easier to say to someone face-to-face that, hey, how about this, interrupt them and so on." C1</p> <p>"Then, the challenges or areas for improvement are with managing a project of this magnitude. I feel like there was missing a managing force or a person, that would hold all the lines and keep things together" C4</p>

4.3.1 Identified Drivers

Regarding the drivers for the digitalization of sales, a conceptual model according to the Media Synchronicity Theory by Dennis et al. (2008) was formed to help the analysis. The conceptual framework suggested, that based on the media capabilities of the digital sales concept, the level of synchronicity it offered is not as high as with face-to-face communication, and therefore the emphasis on the communication process should be put more on conveyance than convergence of information.

The empirical findings were rather similar to the conceptual model. As the analysis already identified, there are certain factors that drive the digitalization of sales interaction. Those factors seem to determine if using a digital channel could possibly be successful during the sales process. For example, the purchaser of the product often had some prior experience regarding the service, and the overall complexity of the solution was not too high. This profile was determined most of all by the *needs* these types of customers had. This means, that in another context that same customer might insist on interacting offline, so those factors are not personal traits that define the individual.

In similar fashion, there are certain drivers and *needs* of customers that insisted on meeting face-to-face during the sales process. Examples of such traits are a big company size, a rigid sourcing process and a complex solution that needs to be co-created. To sum up, table 8 below displays the factors that were identified to drive the digitalization of sales interaction. Furthermore, the table also gathers the factors that drive offline interaction during the sales process.

Table 8: Drivers of online and offline interaction

<i>Drivers of online interaction</i>	<i>Drivers of offline interaction</i>
Customer has done research beforehand	Customer making a bigger investment, has a larger user-base and a rigid sourcing process involving multiple people
Individual searching and testing of potential solutions	In search of a partnership
Investment and user-base smaller	Important to meet the people behind the solution
Customer has often used or heard of the solution earlier	The solution has to be modified
The solution works as-is, or the need for modification is small	

The drivers of tables 7 and 8 are in line with the conceptual model based on the Media Synchronicity Theory by Dennis et al. (2008). The factors that enable online interaction during the sales process also involve a communication process emphasizing conveyance of information over convergence. Once the task requires high synchronicity, the digitalized channel becomes insufficient, and the communication needs to occur face-to-face. Furthermore, the interview data suggested, that with the right appropriation factors, such as prior experience of using the medium for purchase, the required level of synchronicity was lowered.

The analysis suggests that there are certain phases in the purchase process that can be done similarly in the digital channel as with face-to-face interaction, and certain phases, which cannot. Initial contact is one of those. Also communicating the needs can be started in both channels. However, the communication of needs is something, which cannot always be finished in the digital channel. The stereotypical customer, who requires meeting face-to-face, often senses quickly that if there is too much information, usually very abstract, to be processed in an online meeting, and it should be rearranged face-to-face, if the sale is to go through.

This aspect meant that the requirements on the convergence of information are high, and the synchronicity of the communication needs to be high, as Dennis et al. (2008) also suggest. It seems that co-creational activities are so demanding that performing them using some other medium than an offline meeting is inefficient, in the setting of

this study. The online demo of the digitalized sales concept does not support interaction or co-creation as such, since the emphasis is more on the speech and demonstration the seller gives, not as much on the interaction between the seller and purchaser.

There seem to be a few factors that help on keeping the emphasis on conveyance over convergence, or in other words in the online interaction. These factors that support interaction without meeting face-to-face were a tangible product or service, that you can feel, test, see and experience. It is easier for the seller to give a demo, and for the customer to process and understand what the topic is about. If the topic becomes more abstract, the likelihood that the meeting and co-creation of the product can be done without sitting down face-to-face, becomes unlikely.

Another factor that has an effect on the co-creational interaction is the size of the investment, which is usually related to the size of the user-base, the amount of people involved in the sourcing process and implementation and the rigidity of the sourcing process overall. This means that even the most tangible product or service might require the physical meeting between the organization and customer. Vice versa, even an abstract co-creational topic can be handled online, if the investment is smaller, and requires the meeting of only a few people.

During the analysis of the video recordings, it became evident that since the screen sharing worked only one way, hindering the possibility for co-creation. The buyer could only describe by words how their current operations are handled, meaning that the buyer has a difficult task building those mental models of what the integrational build might look like, if the current solution that Movenium is offering is insufficient. This would suggest, that the online sales and role of the seller moves towards a transactional type, as co-creation in the online environment is difficult.

Therefore, when the service was purchased online, the customers are rarely involved in co-producing the service together with Movenium. The emphasis is on finding the desired solution to solve the problem they are facing, and the means to find this solution are not as relevant. As long as the problem is solved as easily as possible they are satisfied. Often, the easiest way is through the digital channel, as this means flexibility in the process. As the head of sales stated, these customers have done their

homework, they know what they want, they search a lot of information about potential solutions, and the contact towards Movenium happens when the purchasing process is well on its way. This statement is supported by the analysis as well.

“A hot lead that comes in, through social media or email or chat, which, as we just discussed about the purchasers, and purchaser’s market, have done a lot of research beforehand. They are aware and have investigated their situation/needs and such, and researched potential solutions, most likely two to three competitors as well. They are quite ready and they have thought about it a lot beforehand, so the whole process with us starts much faster.” M1, Head of Sales, Movenium

Testing the solution and meeting afterward can be done on both channels as well. This phase means both introducing the possibility for the test-period, and answering any experiences and questions that might arise during the phase. It depended on the customer in which channels the interactions in the testing phase were done, and it was influenced by the prior decisions. Usually, if the customers had communicated in the digitalized channel during all the previous phases, they would continue similarly in the latter phase. Vice versa, if the communication had earlier shifted to face-to-face meetings, the test-period would be handled in the same manner.

4.3.2 Effects on Customer Experience

The finding, that co-creation rarely occurs in the digital sales channel, is a significant finding regarding the synthesis of customer experience as well. As highlighted in tables 7 and 9, there are certain advantages and challenges that the interviewees highlighted during the interviews regarding the use of a digital communication channel for communication during the sales process. These findings are generic in a sense that the interviewees experienced them regardless of the context, meaning, for example, the size of the customer company, the amount of users that the service would have or how complex the solution was. These qualities are summed up in table 9 below:

Table 9: Advantages and challenges regarding the interactions with the digitalized sales concept

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Flexible, effective and quick meetings	Difficulty understanding and learning many things at once
Agile and caring company image	Monologues demo from the seller
Problems and questions swiftly handled	Emphasis too much on the offering, and customer needs are forgotten
Overall quick and effortless sales process	Concentration on handling details and forgetting the big picture

As shown in the above, some of the advantages include the possibility to quickly and effortlessly arrange meetings between the seller and customer. The customers get the feeling that their concerns are taken seriously, and can be swiftly answered. The challenges become salient when there is a lot of information that needs to be handled simultaneously, and the process includes many people. There is also a danger, that the digital meetings concentrate too much on details, and forget the big picture.

Analyzing the customer experience from the value that the customer perceives, there is a difference between customers on how they perceive value, and what they consider valuable overall, depending on the purchasing medium. These findings are showed in Figures 7 and 8, which adopt elements from the general framework by Gentile et al., 2007. With customers who had used the digital channel, the value was above all in the flexibility, quickness and easiness of the selling process, which seamlessly delivered a solution, which suited their needs. With the customer of the offline environment, it was in more in co-creating the solution to match their needs, and forming a partnership with possibilities for further development of the solution and expanding the user base.

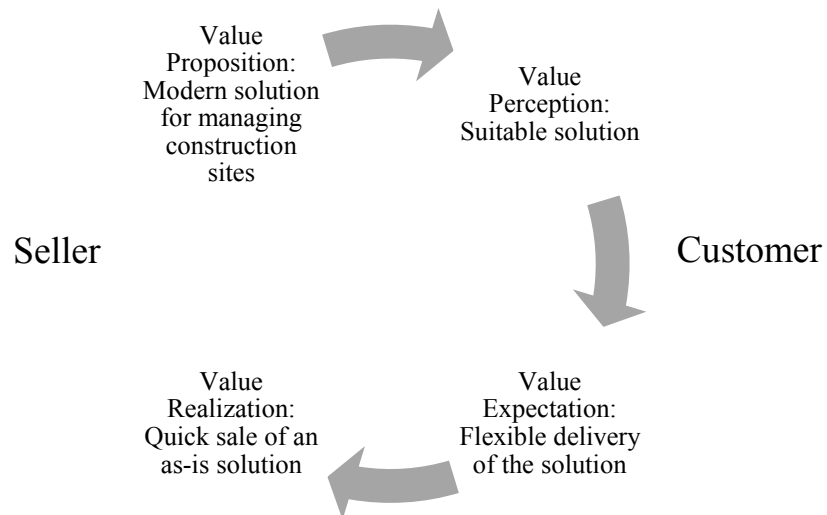


Figure 7: Online Customer and Seller Experience

During the customer interviews, it became evident, that the selling process began with similar actions regardless of the needs that the customer had. This finding was further confirmed during the interviews with the personnel from Movenium, which is that Movenium does not profile or segment customers much in advance, but rather attempts to begin every sales process by feeling out the customer with a digital meeting, and move forward from there, depending on how the customer wants.

Based on the customer interviews, and supported by the video recordings of the online sales meetings, the value proposition that Movenium makes is delivering a modern and digital solution to help customers, mainly in the construction industry, to manage their everyday operations and reduce unnecessary paperwork. After hearing the customer, their needs, current knowledge, and expectations, the meetings that are held afterward might happen either face-to-face or in the digital channel.

Based on the interviews, even though the propositions are the same for every new prospect, the perceptions that the customers make are different based on their needs. The sale, that goes through the digital channel, often includes a customer who is looking for a ready solution, that is flexibly and quickly delivered. As mentioned, the video recordings clearly show how the screen sharing works only one way. Movenium are able show their current solution and what it can do to the customer, but the customer can only describe by words how their current operations or build is handled.

Therefore, the value realization for Movenium is a new, somewhat effortless sale of an as-is solution. Only minor tweaking and selections for settings are required.

However, certain needs also steer other customers to meeting the seller face-to-face. The reasons behind this were discussed thoroughly in the previous chapter, but the effect these meetings have on customer experience and the value perceptions and expectations for the customer are generally in the partnership that is formed with Movenium, as shown in Figure 8. Either the needs and desired solution mean that the topic is too abstract to be handled without meeting face-to-face, or the customer is looking to develop the solution further, or scale it much bigger, and wants to make certain who they are doing business with.

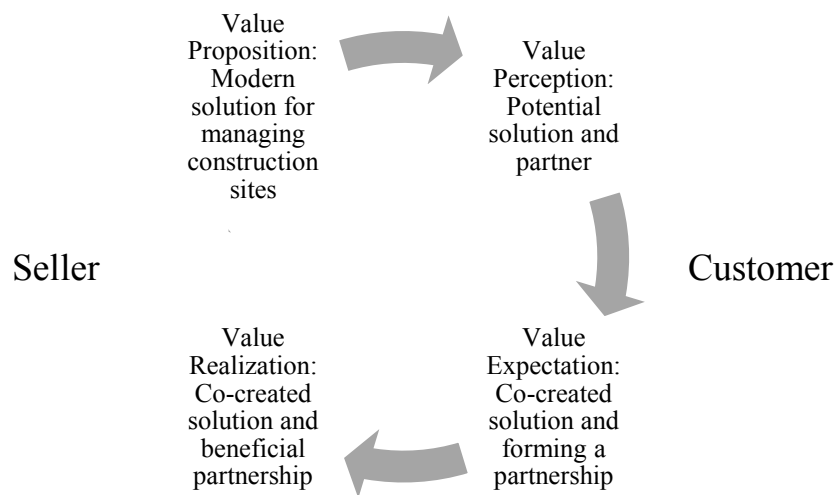


Figure 8: Offline Customer and Seller Experience

5. Conclusions

Digitalization of communication has transformed the way customers and sellers communicate in sales interaction. When the interaction moves to a digitalized channel, the traditional roles of the seller and customer may change. As the online medium does not always support as synchronous communication as face-to-face interaction, the communication process emphasizes conveyance of information over convergence. Therefore, the information that the customer and seller can process over this digitalized channel has a retrospective and slower manner. Face-to-face communication becomes a requirement whenever the communication requires higher synchronicity, such as with co-creation.

Furthermore, as the digitalization has increased the availability of information the seller and buyer become more informed about each other, the offering, competitors, alternatives and everything relevant. The increase in information, combined with the digitalization of sales interaction, the shift of the sales actions based on the study is towards either transactional or value-based. Whenever dealing with a well-known offering, the customer familiarizes autonomously the solution, and the digitalized channel becomes simply an efficient mean for acquiring the desired offering. Whenever the solution requires rework, and both parties are interested in co-creation, meeting face-to-face becomes necessary, for both communicational reasons, but also according to the customer for the need to meet their potential business partners personally. In the latter context, the sales actions that the seller takes becomes closer to value-based selling.

5.1. Synthesis of the Findings

The thesis set out to find what factors drive the digitalization of sales interaction, and how does this effect the customer experience. The factors were analyzed from an interactional perspective, meaning how the communication of the selling process should be constructed so that it would support interaction in a digitalized channel. Media Synchronicity Theory (MST) by Dennis et al. (2008) provided good insight on the effect communication media has on communication performance, meaning how

well shared understanding is formed and how does it depend on the medium. The analysis of the empirical data had many similar findings to those of MST.

In MST, all communication processes are composed of two variables, conveyance (transmission) and convergence (understanding). This shows the duality that the most effective way of transmitting information might not allow the processing of that information as well. Furthermore, according to MST, every medium has certain capabilities, that support transmission or processing, or in other words affect the synchronicity (shared pattern of coordinated behavior) of the media. The digitalized sales channel in this case study does not support as high levels of synchronicity as face-to-face communication. Appropriation factors, such as prior training of using the media, can lower the required synchronicity, which was found with the empirical findings as well. (Dennis et al. 2008)

Yet, communication media provides only one side to the study of the drivers for the digitalization of sales. It offers the tools to analyze how the communication process should be set up for the success of the sales in a digitalized channel. To form a holistic understanding, the factors behind the whole phenomenon need to be taken into account as well. Digitalization is the driving force behind this study, but it can also mean different things and be inspected from multiple perspectives.

In the sense of technological development, digitalization has increased the connectivity between customer and businesses, as the technology required to participate to these digitalized meetings is at the disposal of more and more enterprises and people. Furthermore, the increase of information that is available regarding products and services, in both B2C and B2B markets, has increased (Zahay et al., 2015). Scholars have argued, that more and more research regarding potential purchases is done before any contact to the sales representatives are made. The consultative sales approach where the seller has a role as an information provider is losing significance, and the movement is towards transactional and value-based selling (Zahay et al., 2015; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). These trends are the enablers of the

successful digitalization of sales interaction as well, since offering information that supports lower synchronicity communication is important.

As any form of digital interaction during the sales phase supports lower synchronicity compared to face-to-face interaction, the emphasis of the communication process should be on the conveyance of information. The conceptual model and the empirical findings support this approach, meaning that the drivers of the digitalization of sales is offering information in formats that support autonomous research and testing of the service or product. One key aspect of the whole study was acknowledging how important the demo of the solution was in the sales process of the case company. It was something concrete that the potential buyer could test autonomously before and after the first contact with the sales representative, lowering the required synchronicity of the communication regarding it.

Since the digitalized channel does not offer all the same symbol sets, if the communication process requires high synchronicity, such as with co-creation of the process, the communication should happen face-to-face, based on the study. This interaction can occur in the digitalized channel successfully, as long as the communication process does not require too high synchronicity, and the tasks that occur during the sales process are designed accordingly. As the media has an effect on the communication, and implies that some actions are harder to execute in the online environment, the customer experience during the sales process is also impacted.

Analyzing customer experience through the value that is formed during the sales process helps on making the concept of customer experience concrete for the reader. Below in Figure 9, the formation of customer experience, combining elements from the general framework by Gentile et al. (2007) and the paper by Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015), and adding the element of different communication environments, is displayed. Furthermore, linkages to the provider, customer and joint

spheres, which were discussed in relation to value co-creation by Grönroos & Voima (2008) are also found:

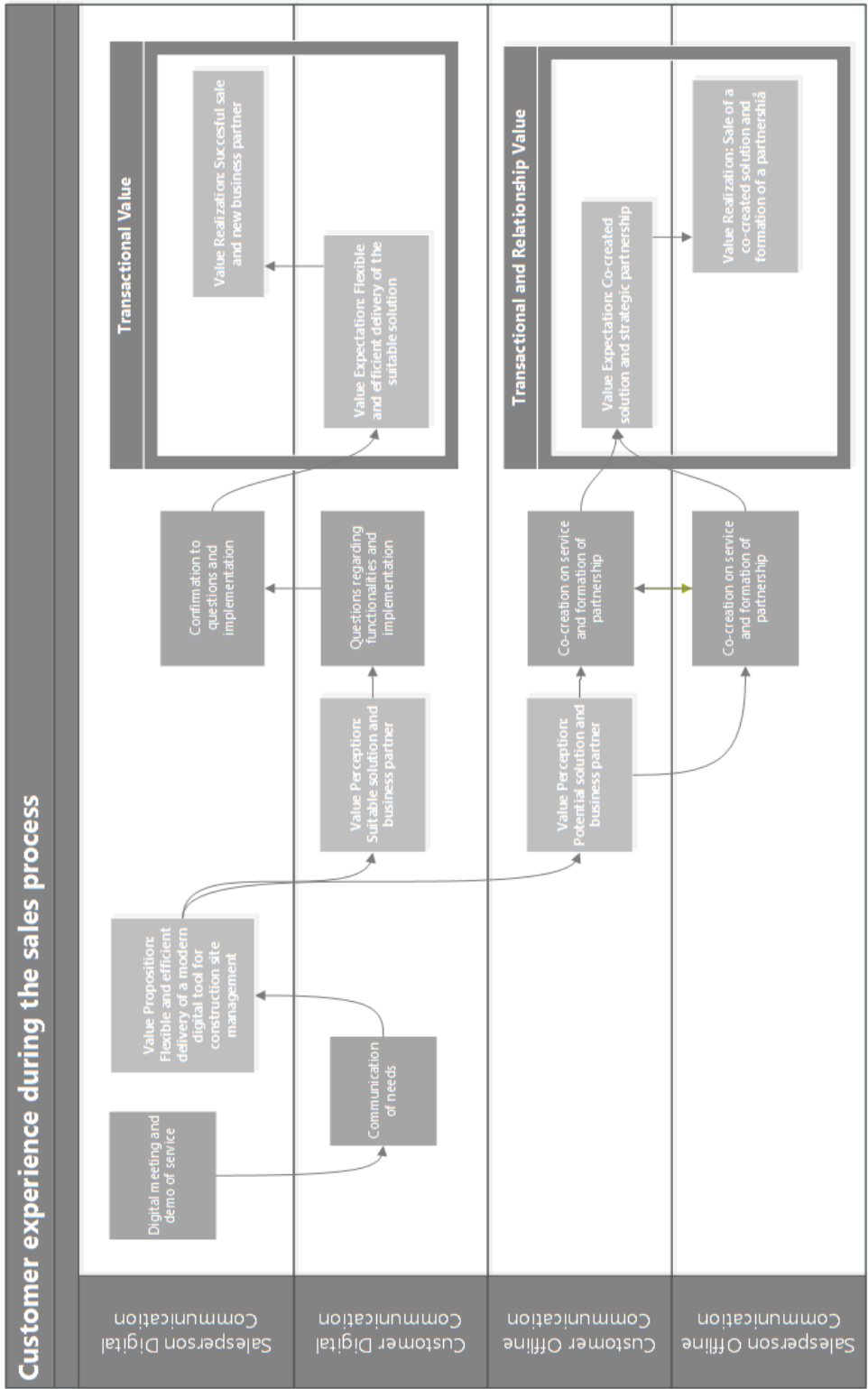


Figure 9: Flowchart of customer experience formation during the sales process

The flowchart points out well how the value proposition made by Movenium happen through online communications and is the same for all potential customers. The value proposition is about offering customers a modern digital tool for managing their construction sites and reducing unnecessary paperwork. Before this value proposition, the online demonstration of the service is held and the customer communicates their needs. In the online environment, the customer can only describe verbally their needs, as well as current operations. The value perception that the customer makes afterward is that the first step that differs between the communication channels, and happens either offline or online and steers the communication towards either channel for the rest of the sales process.

The customer who keeps on communicating the whole sales process online often finds the solution based on the demo, and the research done beforehand, to suit their needs and therefore the value perception is related to it. Finding a proper solution and a business partner was the whole intention of the online meeting. Vice versa, some of the customers sense that the solution which was demonstrated is potential, as well as the company behind it, but would rather meet offline to receive further confirmation. Their value perception is related to the potential of co-creating the solution further and simultaneously forming a mutually beneficial, even strategic partnership.

The online customer continues the process by communicating online the questions regarding the solution to make sure that the current build is capable of answering their needs, and that the implementation would happen as smoothly as possible. The salesperson attempts to answer these needs, once again online, and the value expectations that the customer forms are about receiving an efficient and flexible delivery and implementation of the service. This is answered by the value realization by Movenium, which is the successful sale and a new business partner. In the online environment, the customer experience that is formed is above all transactional value (Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2015).

In the offline context, where both the salesperson and customer co-create the solution, the value expectation that the customer forms is related to the mutually produced service, and partnership that is achieved during the process. The value realization is, therefore, the successful sale of the co-created solution (transactional value) but also the strategic partnership that is formed during this co-creational process (relationship

value), which were both described in the article by Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2015). Transactional value occurs in both the online and offline setting, though it could be argued that the amount of value is higher online, as the sale and purchase is delivered in a more efficient and flexible manner.

Based on the findings made in this case, the relationship value that is to be formed during the sales process happens in the offline setting, since co-creation of the service cannot happen unless met face-to-face, or at least it becomes inefficient and difficult, with the setting of this study. This has an effect on the customer experience during the sales process since it is related to value and interaction as well. The customer experience in the online environment is about the transactional value that happens with the efficient purchase, and in the offline context more about the relationship value that is formed during face-to-face meetings and co-creation. These findings are in line with the proposition by Mantrala & Albers (2012), who state that digitalization is driving sales towards either transactional or value based, depending on the offering.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

The thesis contributes to current literature and knowledge of digitalization of sales and sales interactions well. Often, qualitative studies that focus on selling actions interview sellers, which makes the setting in this thesis of concentrating especially on the customers novel and valuable. As the focus is on understanding what selling actions can be digital, and how customer experience is formed in each context, interviewing the determinants of that experience is a logical choice. Furthermore, to assist in forming a holistic picture, and to understand how the selling process is set up and managed, personnel from the case company were interviewed as well.

As Cummins et al. (2016) identified: "Beyond organizational design and sales leadership studies, little research exists to describe how omni-channel efforts in the B2B setting can be expected to impact salespeople or the sales function". This thesis helps to answer this question to some extent. The impact on sales function is summed up well by the words of the CEO of Movenium stating that the new salespeople they bring in differ from the traditional sales personality notably. No more is the social aspect of bonding with the customer and eventually convincing them to purchase something that they were never going to take in the first place, but rather it is about

knowing the offering and the possibilities it has as well as possible and communicating these to the customer. With the digitalization of sales, the sellers become customer service specialists. As the interviewed digital customers put it, much of the interaction they had with the seller was about answering the questions they had to present, and giving confirmation that the solution answers their needs. The customer dictates how the digital selling process advances, and the seller complies.

The thesis also showcased how studies regarding communication media, and in this case Media Synchronicity Theory (Dennis et al., 2008), could be used to make educated guesses and assumption regarding the drivers of the digitalization of sales interaction. By combining the empirical findings with current research, the findings stay both relevant regarding established and tested theories, but also have a linkage with what the interviewees had to say regarding the topic. The strengths of using an abductive research approach were evident.

Furthermore, the findings of the thesis regarding the effects of digitalization on sales interaction are similar to the ones in literature (Grewal et al., 2015; Mantrala & Albers, 2012; Zahay et al., 2015). As the connectivity of enterprises and customers, together with the amount of information that is available, increases, selling approaches become closer to transactional with a well-known offering, or value-based with solutions that are more abstract. The role of a seller as a provider of information is diminishing. Furthermore, more and more work before the first contact happens individually by the buyer, and the contact is often made further in the purchasing process, closer to the purchasing decision itself.

5.3. Managerial Implications

The digital selling concept that Movenium has implemented has clear potential for similar small and medium sized enterprises, and even startups, if adapted correctly. It has the potential of increasing the availability, flexibility and efficiency for both the provider as well as the customer. It also brings international markets up close, even for smaller companies without big sales forces. The sellers can quickly respond to potential customers far away and setting dates for meetings does not require a lot of preparation, but can happen even with a short notice. Expansion to new markets can be initiated by hiring a native speaker to the headquarters, who can begin the sales

work. There is not that big of a need to set up operations in the destination country, with companies similar to Movenium, at least initially.

As mentioned in the analysis, the digital selling process seems much more straightforward, compared with for example the consultative or value-based selling approach. This stems from the needs that the customers have, as they seem much more aware of what sort of a service Movenium is offering, and how well it answers the needs that they have. The digital selling concept skips some of the phases of the sales process, such as co-creating the solution and moves faster to the purchasing decision. The solution is not built as such, but rather the customer wishes to receive confirmation that the service does what it is supposed to do, after which they move straight to the trial or purchase phase.

In order to increase the amount of digital customers, companies need to concentrate on the information output of for example their websites and other media. The analysis and findings of the thesis suggest that in order to support the digital sales concept, the communication process should emphasize conveyance processes over convergence. In other words, enterprises should offer to the customer information for autonomous inspection and processing, in an asynchronous manner. Whenever misunderstandings begin to arise, and the requirement for higher synchronicity of communication happens, meeting the seller face-to-face often becomes the way to proceed.

Managers of such companies need to understand the words of the CEO of Movenium, who mentioned that the traits and qualities of a “digital seller” are different compared with the traditional seller type. Understanding the service and what it can do, and communicating this to the customer is essential. The type of role the seller takes is more of a customer service type. The digital customer is above all interested in solving the issues they currently have without spending too much time in the process. The means or purchasing method are not of that much relevance, as long as their problems are solved.

Furthermore, there are ways to make communicating in the digital channel easier for both parties. Knowing the service, what it does and how to use it enriches the dialogue between the seller and purchaser, which means that promoting autonomous downloading and testing of the service or product to the customers is a clear way of

increasing the chances that the digital channel is sufficient for the sales. Further interactional perspectives that managers should consider are related to the agenda and facilitation of the digital meeting. For example, C4 suggested thinking of such questions, that the customer could not answer them correctly without actually understanding what the topic and learning outcomes were about. Otherwise, as reviewed during the analysis of the video recordings, the customer simply answers “yes” many times in a row, without genuinely signaling understanding.

The clearest benefit that the digital selling concept and communication had, from the customer's point of view, was the efficiency of the concept, personal feedback and service they received during it, and fast response time to even smaller topics and issues. This, on the other hand, brings about a challenge that needs to be kept in mind, meaning that it is important the whole sales process keeps the big picture in the background. Otherwise, the meetings focus on sub-optimizing individual aspects, but the overall solution that is formed might not work right away.

Nevertheless, the findings made in the case suggest that there are scenarios where having a face-to-face meeting is necessary. Based on the case data, not every sale can be handled, or in other words, not every customer can be served in the digital channel, so companies similar to Movenium should concentrate on identifying customer segments early on. Those customer needs guides the sales process from there onwards.

Naturally, these findings were based on the insight and opinions of the customers of Movenium. Companies, customers, markets, industries, and cultures are different everywhere, so gathering feedback constantly from your customers about the interaction during the sales case is also encouraged. Some incentive, such as a discount on the subscription of the first month might help in getting answers, based on which further development regarding the interactions can be done. The topic is rather abstract for many people at least initially, which was experienced firsthand during the interviews, so gaining valuable insight is difficult, but also fruitful.

5.4. Limitations and Further Avenues for Research

The research method that was used in this thesis brings about certain limitations regarding the results. A single case study, which is a justified method for a setting such as this, means that ultimately the findings apply in the context of the focal company

and their interviewed customers. Furthermore, the digital selling concept was rather novel, and under constant development and improvement in the company, meaning that the described results applicability diminishes over time.

In addition, the thesis, the collection of data, analysis, and synthesis were the work of a single researcher. Even though guidance from more experienced researchers was given throughout the thesis process, certain biases can be formed that the researcher might not notice. The fact that this thesis was not conducted for the case company as such reduces the chances of bias towards them, but for example, during the interviews, the interviewee might have lead the clients to emphasize findings that would suit prior analysis.

Further research should first of all test the findings made in the thesis. The study implies, that in an online context, and with the sales interaction happening in a digitalized channel, the selling becomes transactional. Linkages to selling in the traditional sense are lacking, and the role of the seller becomes similar to customer service. The process is lead more and more by the customer, and the seller simply assists the customers with their purchase. Future research could study, if online selling is become less and less seller-dependent, and more about empowered customers making autonomous purchases. A proposal for a research questions to study this statement is for example:

- 1) To what extent is selling through a digitalized channel similar to customer service?

Furthermore, even though the data that was collected in the study is qualitative, for example the different customer needs, and the generic qualities that they possess, emerged. It is stated that these needs implicate if digital selling can be used to serve these customers. Studying if this statement is true should be done using a quantitative approach, by for example sending out a survey to all customers in order to find out with a larger sample what was the sales channel that the customer went through, and does a certain profile of a customer emerge.

In similar fashion, it seemed that co-creation over the service could not happen, or at least it was not feasible, online. This was mostly related to the fact the topics of the co-creational activities are often so abstract and required high synchronicity between

the communication partners. Therefore, meeting face-to-face seemed to be the only way for the customers to advance in the process. Similarly, in these cases, they were much more interested in seeing the people behind the service, and who they are going into business with. Nevertheless, the sales in the online environment were valuable to the customer as well, but the value is in a different form, such as the effortless purchase of the solution. Future studies should further investigate this assumption, and the second proposed research question is therefore:

- 2) How can the co-creation of a service during the sales phase happen online, without the salesperson and customer meeting physically at any point?

Answering this question could also be done by examining, if there are any possible interactional tools that work online, and would enable the co-creation between the seller and purchaser. As of now, the current process does not support co-creation. Therefore, as mentioned, the digital selling concept, in this case, is rather limited. As mentioned, the concept with Movenium means communicating with voice and through a shared screen for giving demos of the service. In future research, the amount of media could be expanded, and include for example instant messaging and webinars. This would further add the linkages to communication media theories, such as Media Synchronicity Theory, but also to the customer experience. A third research question to study this is:

- 3) Is customer experience positively enhanced through the use of multiple communication media during the sales process?

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7. Appendix

7.1. Appendix 1: Customer Interview Questions in Finnish

DICIA Movenium

6.4.2017

ASIAKASHAASTATTELUT RUNKO, HAASTATTELUKIERROS 1

Tutkija taustoitus ennen haastattelua

DICIA on Tekesin ja kumppaniyritysten rahoittama tutkimus, jossa tutkimme asiakasvuorovaikutuksen digitalisoitumista ja sen vaikutuksia. Mukana Aalto-yliopisto, Haaga-Helia sekä Helsingin yliopisto. Kaikki haastattelut käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja tulokset anonymisoidaan. Kysytään lupa nauhoittaa haastattelu. Haastattelussa olemme kiinnostunut kuulemaan henkilön omista kokemuksista ja näkemyksistä asioista, emme siitä miten oletetaan, että asioiden pitäisi toimia tai virallisista prosessikuvauksista.

Taustakysymykset

Kerrotko lyhyesti mitä teet työksesi ja miten olet päätenyt tähän tehtävään.

Miten olet yleensä tekemisessä teille palveluja myyvien yritysten kanssa?

Päätätkö hankinnoista? Minkälaisissa hankintaprosesseissa ja missä vaiheessa prosessia olet mukana? Ketkä teillä viime kädessä tekevät lopullisen päätöksen ja miten?

Movenium myyntiprosessi ja sen aikainen asiakaskokemus

Millainen kokemus asiointi Moveniumin kanssa oli ylipäätään?

Milloin olet törmännyt Moveniumiin ensimmäisen kerran?

Minkälainen ensimmäinen kokemus yrityksestä oli? Miten aikaisempi kokemus vaikutti nyt tarkasteltavaan myyntiprosessiin?

Mistä alkoi keskustelu tämän Moveniumin palvelun mahdollisesta ostamisesta? (ensikontakti)

Millainen fiilis sinulle jäi bookausfirman kanssa keskustelusta?

Minkälainen mielikuva tai arvio sinulla oli Moveniumista ennen ensimmäistä etätapaamista?

Miten prosessi eteni ensimmäisen kontaktin jälkeen?

Mitä konkreettisia tapahtumia ja tilanteita prosessissa oli? Keitä teiltä oli prosessissa mukana arvioimassa palvelua ja päättämässä sen ostamisesta?

Käytitkö Moveniumin palvelua ilmaisena kokeiluaikana (trial)? Miten kokeilu mielestäsi toimi?

Ketkä kaikki kokeilivat testipalvelua? Miten teidän sisäinen viestintänne toimi koeaikana (esim. työmaalta henkilöstöhallintoon, muilta hankinnasta päättävälle taholle)?

Keräsitkö kokemuksia muilta Moveniumin asiakkailta, somesta tai omasta tuttavapiiristäsi?

Missä vaiheessa? Keneltä? Miksi?

Miten mietitte ja valmistelite palvelun käyttöönottoa? Kuinka hyvin käyttöönotto toteutui?

Millaisia huolia teillä nousi esille hankintaan liittyen? Miten näihin vastattiin?

Mikä palvelun hankinnassa ylipäätään oli sujuvaa? Mikä taas ei ollut niin sujuvaa?

Päätöksenteko

Miten päädyitte tekemäänne päätökseen?

Mitä asioita punnitsitte tämän ja muiden vaihtoehtojen välillä? Otitteko käyttäjien näkökulmia huomioon päätöksenteossa?

Mitkä tekijät mielestäsi vaikuttivat eniten tekemäänne päätökseen?

Oliko joitain muita tekijöitä, joita olisit itse halunnut painottaa päätöksessä enemmän? Oliko joitakin tekijöitä, joiden välillä jouduitte puntaroimaan valintaanne enemmän?

(Jos ei ottaneet Moveniumia): Missä asioissa valittu ratkaisu oli parempi?

jatkokysymykset syystä johtuen....

Oletko ollut tyytyväinen tekemäänne päätökseen?

Onko jokin jäänyt kaduttamaan? Olisitko itse halunnut, että asiat menevät toisin?

Vuorovaikutus

Keiden kanssa olitte tekemissä Moveniumilla hankintanne aikana?

Miten koit henkilökohtaisen yhteyden ja yhteisymmärryksen toimivan eri henkilöiden kanssa?

Minkälainen tunnelma tapaamisissa mielestäsi oli?

Miten etäyhteys mielestäsi vaikutti tapaamisen tunnelmaan?

Miltä sinusta tuntui keskustella, kun et nähnyt myyjää?

Oliko sinusta helppoa jakaa työpöytä ja testata palvelua etäyhteyden aikana?

Miten muuten koit etätapaamisen erilaisena verrattuna kasvokkasiin myyntitapaamisiin?

Missä vaiheessa olisit hyötynyt kasvokkaisesta tapaamisesta?

Olisiko ollut parempi, että toinen tapaaminen olisi ollut kasvokkainen? Tai kolmas?

Millaisia hyötyjä mielestäsi etäyhteyden käytössä oli?

Miten koit etäyhteyden vaikuttavan siihen kuvaan, mikä teille syntyi Moveniumista mahdollisena palvelun toimittajana?

Miten etäyhteys vaikutti luottamuksen syntymiseen? Lisäkö etäyhteys epävarmuuden kokemuksia tai pohdinnan määrää päätöksenteossa?

Koitko tullee kuulluksi ja ymmärretyksi prosessin aikana?

Loppukysymykset

Minkälainen mielikuva sinulla on nyt noin kuukausi hankinnan jälkeen Moveniumista?

Onko mielikuvasi tai kokemuksesi muuttunut prosessin aikana tai sen jälkeen?

Jos päädyitte hankkimaan Moveniumin palvelun, miten se on toiminut yrityksessänne?

Kenen kanssa olette olleet Moveniumilla tekemisissä sen jälkeen? Miten nämä kontaktit ovat sujuneet?

Miten sinun mielestäsi asiakasvuorovaikutusta voisi kehittää, Moveniumin kanssa tai yleisemminkin?

Onko jotain digitaalisia ratkaisuja, jotka voisivat parantaa tai helpottaa asiakasvuorovaikutusta? Toisaalta oletko huomannut digitaalisten ratkaisuiden hankaloittavan asiakasvuorovaikutusta?

Onko vielä jotain muuta mitä haluaisit sanoa näistä käsittelemistämme aiheista? Onko jotain mitä emme ole osanneet kysyä?

7.2. Appendix 2: Translated Customer Interview Questions in English

DICIA Movenium

6.4.2017

CUSTOMER INTERVIEW BASELINE, INTERVIEW ROUND 1

Background of the study before beginning the interviewing

DICIA is a study funded by Tekes and participating companies, in which the digitalization of customer interaction and the effect it has is studied. It involves Aalto-University, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and Helsinki University. All the interviews will be handled in confidence, and the results will be anonymous. Ask for the permission to record the interview. In the interview we are interested in hearing the experiences and insight of the customer on the subject, not about assumptions on how processes or things should happen or be handled.

Background questions

Please explain briefly what is your job like and how did you get into this position?

How are you involved with companies selling you services?

Do you make the decision on what to purchase? In what types of sourcing processes are you involved in and which part of those processes? Who makes the ultimate decision in your company on what to purchase and how?

The selling process of Movenium and the customer experience during it

Overall, what type of an experience was doing business with Movenium like?

When was the first time you came into contact or heard about Movenium?

What was the first experience like this time? How did possible previous experiences effect it?

From where did the dialogue for acquiring the services from Movenium come from? (first contact)

What kind of a feeling were you left with after talking to the booking firm?

What kind of an image or assesment did you have of Movenium before meeting them?

How did you proceed with the process after meeting the first time?

What concrete actions and situations was there in the process? Who was involved from you side when making the decisions and reviews of the service?

Did you use the free trial by Movenium? How did it work out?

Who were involved with the trial? How did your inner communication work during the trial? (for example from the construction site to the people making the purchasing decision?)

Did you gather experiences about the service from other users, or the social media or by other means?

At which point? From whom? Why?

How did you prepare for the implementation and use of the service? Was it successful?

What type of concerns rose during the sourcing phase? Were these concerns handled? How?

What was smooth about the sourcing process overall? What was not?

Decision making

How did you end up making the decision?

What factors did you compare with this service and other? Were end-users opinions heard?

Which factors effected your purchasing decision the most?

Were there any factors that you would have wanted to emphasize more?
Were there factors that you had to compare and weigh more than others?

(If they did not purchase Movenium): What aspects were better with the other solution?

Further questions about the factors...

Were/are you happy with your decision?

Has anything been bothering you? Would have you done something differently if you would know the things you know now back then?

Interaction

Who were you in contact with from Movenium during the process?

Do you feel like you found a personal contact with those people? How well and easy was forming this relation for you?

What kind of an atmosphere was there in those meetings?

How do you feel not meeting the seller face-to-face effected the meeting?

How did you feel like communicating without seeing the seller?

Was sharing the screen and testing the service easy for you?

How did you feel the digital meeting different compared to meeting face-to-face?

Were there any points or phases when meeting face-to-face would have been better?

Would have it been better if the second or third meeting would have been face-to-face?

What were the benefits and advantages of these digital meetings for you?

How do you feel the digital meeting affected the image you had of Movenium?

How did it affect the building and formation of trust? Did it enhance the insecurities or pondering of the purchasing decision?

Did you feel heard and understood during the process?

Final questions

What kind of an image do you have of Movenium since it has been about a month after the purchase?

How has your image or opinion changed during the process?

If you ended up purchasing Movenium, how has it worked in your company?

Who have you been in contact with from Movenium after the purchase? How have these contacts went?

How could customer interaction be developed with Movenium, or overall even?

Can you think of any digital solutions that would further develop customer interaction? Or have you noticed or felt that digital solutions make customer interaction more difficult and complicated?

Is there still something you wish to say regarding the topic? Is there something we forgot or didn't realize to ask?

7.3. Appendix 3: Case Company Interview Questions in Finnish

DICIA Movenium
10.8.2017

MYYJÄHAASTATTELUT

Tutkija taustoitus ennen haastattelua

Taustakysymykset

Kerrotko lyhyesti historiastasi Moveniumilla, työtehtävistä siellä, nykyisestä tehtävästä, vastuualueista, ja kuinka kauan olet yhteensä yrityksessä ja näissä tehtävissä työskennellyt?

Miten olet mukana myyntityössä, ja erityisesti etämyyntiprosessissa?
Minkä suuntaista kehitystä myyntityössä on tapahtunut sinä aikana?

Miten kuvailisit myyntityötä Moveniumilla? Oletteko mukana nimenomaan esimerkiksi ratkaisumyynnissä, tai arvomyynnissä (solution or value-based selling)?

Miten se näkyy myyntityössä? Hahmottavatko asiakkaat tätä ulottuvuutta?

Movenium myyntiprosessi

Kuvailisitko omin sanoin teidän myyntiprosessia/myyntiprosesseja ja asiakaskohtaamisia näissä, ja kuinka ne toteutuvat käytännössä?

Onko teillä käytössä kaksi selkeästi erilaista myyntiprosessia, eli etämyynti ja kasvokkainen myynti? Eroavatko prosessit kanavasta riippuen, vai onko kyseessä sama prosessi mutta vain eri kanavassa?

Miten keräätte tietoa potentiaalisista asiakkaista?

Jos miettii asiakkaan koko elinkaarta, missä vaiheessa myynti on mukana, ja kuinka kauan?

Kuinka monta tapaamista yleensä sisältyy myyntiprosessiin, vai vaihtelee se suurestikin?

Ketä muita tahoja/funktioita Moveniumilta on asiakkaan elinkaaren hallinnassa mukana? Kuinka yhteistyö myyntifunktion kanssa toimii?

Mistä etämyyntiprosessi on lähtöisin?

Kuinka paljon se on kehittynyt ja muuttunut matkan varrella, ja miten sitä ollaan kehittämässä edelleen? Mitä vahvuuksia tai heikkouksia koet etämyynnissä olevan?

Minkä koet olevan perimmäinen syy siihen, että etämyyntikonsepti on otettu käyttöön? Eli onko se ainoa tapa vastata asiakkaan tai teidän yrityksen tarpeisiin, vai onko niin, että asiakkaat haluavat jotain tiettyä asiaa tai tietynlaista palvelua ja etämyyntikonsepti on yksi keino vastata tähän?

Voisiko molemmista myyntiprosesseista saada selkeästi vaiheet josta ne koostuvat?

Mitä missäkin vaiheessa käsitellään? Kuinka säänneltyjä prosessit ovat, vai joustavatko ne paljonkin tilanteesta riippuen? Kuinka paljon asiakkaalla on sananvaltaa esimerkiksi yhteydenpidon suhteen, eli miten edetään, mitä kanavaa käytetään, ketä osallistuu Moveniumin päästä?

Miten lähdette muodostamaan yhteyttä ja dialogia potentiaalisen asiakkaan kanssa, kun teette ensimmäistä kontaktia?

Miten käytössä oleva kanava vaikuttaa tähän? Kuinka paljon vaikuttaa se, mitä asiakas tietää etukäteen yrityksestä tai palvelusta?

Kuinka perillä asiakkaat ovat keskimäärin siitä, mitä ovat hankkimassa?

Näkyykö tämä jossain, esimerkiksi siinä miten myyntiprosessissa edetään, tai mitä kanavaa käytetään? Miten asiakkaat yleensä tätä tietoa ovat hankkineet?

Millaiset tavoitteet teillä on myyntiprosessin aikana? Onko esimerkiksi onnistunut kauppa tärkein, vai luotu suhde ja kumppanuus?

Miten tämä tavoite vaikuttaa siihen, kuinka vuorovaikutatte asiakkaan kanssa? Onko kanavalla vaikutusta teidän mielestä tähän? Jos niin miten?

Mitä asiakkaat mielestäsi Moveniumilta hakevat?

Vaihteleeiko asiakkaiden tavoitteet kuinka paljon? Riippuen asiakkaan yleisistä, tai yksittäisen myyntitapaamisen tarpeista, vaihteletteko myyntikanavaa?

Vuorovaikutus

Miten koet henkilökohtaisen yhteyden ja yhteisymmärryksen toimivan asiakkaan kanssa kanavasta riippuen?

Mitkä tekijät mielestäsi vaikuttavat yhteisymmärryksen syntymiseen? Mitkä ovat hyvän yhteisymmärryksen ja dialogin indikaattorit sinulle?

Miten pystyt auttamaan dialogin muodostumista erityisesti digikanavassa, huomaatko eroja asiakkaiden välillä?

Miten koet eron digikanavan ja kasvokkaisen tapaamisen välillä nimenomaan dialogin näkökulmasta?

Minkä tyyppisten ihmisten kanssa yhteys digikanavassa löytyy helposti? Miten tätä yhteyden muodostusta voisi helpottaa?

Kuinka paljon esimerkiksi ennakkuuloilla on mielestäsi merkitystä?

Miten etäyhteys mielestäsi vaikutti myyntitapaamisen tunnelmaan?

Miltä sinusta tuntuu keskustella, kun et näe asiakasta? Mitä haasteita tai mahdollisuuksia se luo?

Onko sinusta helppoa jakaa työpöytä ja esitellä palvelua etäyhteyden aikana? Vaatiiko asiakkaan houkuttelu mukaan kuinka paljon?

Miten muuten koet etätapaamisen erilaisena verrattuna kasvokkaiseen myyntitapaamisiin?

Missä vaiheessa hyödyt kasvokkaisesta tapaamisesta? Entä milloin digitapaamisesta?

Mitkä ovat mielestäsi eri kanavien suurimmat vahvuudet ja heikkoudet? Mikä on haastavinta etätapaamisissa? Mitä veikkaat, mikä on haastavinta asiakkaalle?

Kuinka paljon koet haasteiden johtuvan nimenomaan kanavasta, vai esimerkiksi siitä, että niitä ei osata tai vaivauduta käyttämään oikein?

Miten koit etäyhteyden vaikuttavan siihen kuvaan, mikä teistä syntyy mahdollisena palvelun toimittajana?

Miten etäyhteys vaikutti luottamuksen syntymiseen? Lisäkö etäyhteys epävarmuuden kokemuksia tai pohdinnan määrää päätöksenteossa? Vai päinvastoin, nopeuttaako ja virtaviivaistaako se prosessia?

Kuinka varmistat, että koko etätapaamisen ajan pysyy fokus ja keskittyminen yllä itsellä? Entä asiakkaalla?

Oletko huomannut jotain heikkouksia nimenomaan siinä, että asiakkaan kasvoja ja olemusta ei näy? Miten esimerkiksi varmistat, että jokin kysymys ymmärretään?

Miten varmistat, että iso kuva pysyy hallinnassa, eikä etätapaaminen mene vain jonkin pienen kokonaisuuden korjaamiseen (eli ei synny sellaista IT-tuen tyyppistä tilannetta)

Voiko kaikkia myyntiprosessin vaiheita siirtää digikanavaan, vai onko mielestäsi jotain tehtäviä, jotka vaativat joko omasta tai asiakkaan puolelta kasvokkain tapaamista?

Löytyykö onnistuneita tai epäonnistuneita esimerkkejä myyntitapaamisista, joissa nimenomaan vuorovaikuttaminen asiakkaan kanssa on ollut isossa roolissa suuntaan tai toiseen?

Loppukysymykset – Onko kyse henkilöstä vai tarpeesta?

Kuinka monta erilaista asiakassegmenttiä itse tunnaisit teillä olevan?

Minkälaisia ne ovat? Huomaako ne kuinka nopeasti heti ensimmäisessä tapaamisessa, että miten tätä kyseistä asiakasta ja segmenttiä tulisi lähestyä? Miten se vaikuttaa myyjän rooliin, vai vaikuttaako ollenkaan?

Kuinka paljon koet, että myyntikanava vaikuttaa asiakkaan arvoon ja onnistuneeseen kauppaan?

Miten etämyynnin käyttöönotto on vaikuttanut Moveniumiin yrityksenä, esimerkiksi tuloksien ja muiden kautta?

Kuinka asiakaskunta on reagoinut?

Miten itse haluaisit, että Movenium palvelee nykyään ja tulevaisuudessa asiakkaita aina myyntiprosessista alkaen?

Miten näet myyjän työn tulevaisuuden, tuleeko myyjän rooli ja sitä kautta vaatimukset muuttumaan?

Onko myyjien vaihtuvuus suurta?

Miten seuraatte ja kehitettää myyntiprosesseja eteenpäin?

Miten näet myyntikanavan roolin, onko kanavalla väliä?

Voiko kaikkia asiakkaita palvella esimerkiksi etänä? Jos ei, niin miksi? Suosivatko samankaltaiset asiakkaat samoja myyntikanavia? Co-creation eli yhdessä kehittäminen?

Voiko tätä etäkanavaa hyödyntää kuinka hyvin myös asiakkuuden hallinnassa ylipäättään?

Millaista myyntiprosessia itse suosit?

Voiko mielestäsi myyntiprosessia kehittää edelleen, ja miten?

Onko vielä jotain mitä kenties unohdin kysyä liittyen tähän asiaan tai teemaan?

7.4. Appendix 4: Case Company Interview Questions Translated to English

DICIA Movenium
10.8.2017

SALESPERSON INTERVIEWS

Background of the study before beginning the interviewing

Background questions

Can you tell me briefly about your history at Movenium, duties there, current job, responsibility areas. How long have you been at Movenium, and with these tasks?

How are you involved in sales and selling, and especially the digitalized sales concept? What sort of development has happened in selling during the time?

How would you describe selling at Movenium? Are you involved in for example solution or value-based selling?

How does it show in selling? Do customers understand this dimension?

The salesprocess of Movenium

In your own words, would you describe your sales process(es), and how are customer involved in these processes. How do these processes transfer to real life?

Do you have explicitly two different sales process, meaning the digitalized sales process and face-to-face selling? Do these process differ depending on the communication channel, or is the process same in both channels?

How do you gather information of potential customers?

If you consider the management of the whole lifecycle of the customer, when is sales involved, and for how long?

How many meetings are usually involved in the sales process, or does it vary? How much?

What other parties/functions at Movenium are involved in managing the customer? How does the co-operation with the sales function work?

Where does the digitalized selling concept originate from?

How much has it developed through time? How is it being developed? What advantages and disadvantages do you consider it has?

What do you feel like is the penultimate reason behind the implementation of the concept? Is it the only way, or just one way among others, to answer the needs that either you or the customer has?

Would it be possible to get clear steps of both sales processes?

What matters are handled in each step? How much is there room to alter and adjust, or are the processes rigid? How much can the customer say or comment on how to keep contact and continue with the process, or what channel to use? Who is involved from your side?

How do you begin to make contact and a dialogue with a potential client?

How does the channel effect this approach? What about the extent that the customer is aware beforehand of the company or service?

On average, how aware are customers beforehand of what they are buying?

How is this visible? Does it effect for example how the sales process moves forward, and what channel is used for communication? How do customers usually acquire this information?

What targets or goals do you have during the sales process? Is for example a successful sale most important, or a new relationship and partnership?

How does this goal effect interaction with the customer? Does the medium have an effect on this, in your opinion? If so, how?

What do you think customer look for in Movenium, above all?

Do the goals of the customers vary? If so, how much? Depending on the overall, or single needs of the customer, do you alter the sales channel?

Interaction

How do you feel personal connection and mutual understanding works with the customer, depending on the communication medium?

What factors in you opinion effect the formation of a shared understanding? What are the indicators of good communication and dialogue for you?

How can you help the formation of a dialogue, especially in a digitalized channel? Do you notice differences between customers?

How do you experience the difference between face-to-face and online meetings, especially from the perspective of maintaining a dialogue?

With whom do you find the connection easily? How can you ease this process of forming a connection with the customer?

How much do you reckon prejudices effect this?

How does the online setting effect the overall feeling and mentality of the meetings?

How do you feel like talking, without seeing the customer? What challenges or possibilities does it bring about?

Do you find it easy to share your screen and desktop and show the service online? Does it take extra effort to lour the customer, and if so how much?

Do you find the online selling different to face-to-face selling in any other way?

At what point do you benefit the most from meeting the customer face-to-face? And when is the benefit with the digitalized selling concept?

What do you think are the biggest benefits and drawbacks of both channels? What is most challenging with the digital selling concept? What do you reckon, what is most challenging for the customer?

How many of the challenges do you think are caused by the communication channel? How much is it for example inexperience of use, or laziness to learn?

How do you think this digital selling concept affects the image that you leave as a service supplier?

How did the online communication effect the formation of trust? Did it increase the amount of insecurity or wondering during the decision making process? Or does it speed up and streamline the process?

How do you try to make sure you maintain focus and concentration throughout the online meeting? How about with the customer?

Have you noticed any weaknesses with not being able to see the face or overall expression of the customer? How do you try to make sure that they for example understand a certain question?

How do you try to make sure that an overall image and focus is maintained, and avoid for the online meetings to concentrate only on minor details? (Avoiding a IT-support type of situation)

Can all the phases of the sales process be moved to the digitalized sales channel, or do you find that there are any actions that require meeting face-to-face (Both from your perspective, or the customer's)

Can you recall any examples of successful or unsuccessful sales cases, where the interaction with the customer played a big picture, one way or another?

Final questions – Is it about the person, or their needs?

How many customer segments would you recognize you have?

What are they like? How quickly can you notice during the first contact/meeting that how this type of customer and segment should be approached? How does it effect the role of the seller, or does it?

How much do you feel like the sales channel has an effect on the value of the customer and a successful meeting?

How does the implementation of the digital sales concept impacted Movenium as a company, through for example results and such?

How have the customers reacted?

Miten itse haluaisit, että Movenium palvelee nykyään ja tulevaisuudessa asiakkaita aina myyntiprosessista alkaen?

How would you want that Movenium serves its customer now and in the future, beginning from the sales process?

How do you see the future of sellers? Will their work and therefore profile be impacted?

How long are the careers of sellers usually, or do they change often?

How do you follow and develop the sales processes?

How do you see the role of the sales channel? Does it matter?

Could you serve all customer similarly for example online? If not, why?

Do similar customers prefer similar sales channels? Co-creation?

How can you benefit from this communication channel overall with for example account management?

What sales process do you prefer yourself?

Can the sales process be developed further? How?

Is there still something you wish to say regarding the topic? Is there something we forgot or didn't realize to ask?